

F O U R
DISSERTATIONS.

I. ON PROVIDENCE.

II. ON PRAYER.

III. On the REASONS for expecting that
virtuous Men shall meet after Death in
a State of Happiness.

IV. On the Importance of CHRISTIANITY,
the Nature of HISTORICAL EVIDENCE,
and MIRACLES.

By RICHARD PRICE, D.D. F.R.S.

The FOURTH EDITION, with ADDITIONS.

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THE Author has bestowed so much pains on the *First* of the following *Dissertations*, that he hopes it will be found worthy of careful attention. His view in the *Second* and *Third Dissertations* is in a great measure *Practical*; and he begs this may be remembered, and that suitable allowances may be made when they are read. He wishes earnestly to be able to contribute towards advancing the interest of virtue and rational religion in the

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world;

world ; and he will think that his life has been spent to a valuable purpose, should he ever succeed in this in the smallest degree.

The *Fourth* Dissertation is designed chiefly in answer to an objection against Christianity, on which considerable stress has been laid. It is, perhaps, too foreign to the main end of this work. There cannot, however, be any great impropriety in giving it a place here.

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TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

THE principal corrections and additions in this Edition are the following. In Page 136. a Note is added to explain an assertion which has been misunderstood.—The latter part of the Second Section of the Fourth Dissertation, the long Note from Page 442 to 453, and the three last Pages are also additions.—Every expression likewise in that Dissertation which had any appearance of an undue severity with respect to Unbelievers has been altered.—The Author is sensible that there are few or no controversies in which it is right to charge an adversary with want of candour and disingenuity. Such charges give no strength to an argument. They always irritate instead of doing good, and it seldom happens that they are not capable of being retorted.

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DISSERTATION I.
ON
PROVIDENCE.

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DISSERTATION I.
ON
PROVIDENCE.

SECTION I.

*Of the arguments for Providence from the
perfections of the Deity.*

IT cannot but be a matter of anxious enquiry with every considerate person, how far he has reason to think well of that world in which he exists, and of its laws and administration. If about this no satisfaction can be obtained, there will be an end of all the chief comforts and hopes of reasonable beings. The course of events must be viewed with suspicion, and the world contemplated with disgust and

4 On PROVIDENCE.

pain. The doctrine of Providence, therefore, is plainly of the highest importance; and the writer of the following Dissertation can want no apology for attempting to assist in explaining and defending it, though he should fall short of his aim, and be able to do no more than shew a good intention, and perhaps engage a few to join with him in carefully reviewing a subject than cannot too often employ our thoughts.

What I shall begin with will be an account of some of the principal arguments that prove an unerring Providence.

If it can be proved that the Deity administers *all* the affairs of the world, and extends his care to *every* created being in such a manner that nothing hard or oppressive, nothing inconsistent with rectitude and wisdom in the government of events ever comes to pass; or, in other words, if it can be proved “that all the occurrences in nature
“are under perfectly wise and good direction;” then the doctrine of Providence,
in

in the highest and strictest sense of it, will be established.

There are two ways of proving this. One, from the consideration of the Divine perfections. The other, from what falls under our notice of the frame and constitution of the world. Let us first consider the evidence arising from the former of these heads.

We have the best reasons for ascribing to the Deity all possible excellence; or for conceiving of the first cause as a Being absolutely perfect. In the idea of absolute perfection is implied infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; and in these, such a providence over all things as has been mentioned. The Deity cannot be an indifferent spectator of the series of events in that world to which he has given being. His goodness will as certainly engage him to direct them agreeably to the ends of goodness, as his wisdom and power enable him to do it in the most effectual manner. Thus we must

conclude according to all our ideas of these attributes. Could we call that Being good who would refuse to do any good which he is able to do without the least labour or difficulty?—God is present every where. He sees all that happens; and it is in his power, with perfect ease, to order all for the best. Can he then possess goodness, and at the same time not do this?—I am, suppose, in affliction. The author of my existence, who is almighty and righteous, knows my condition, and sees what I feel. Would he, if he saw that my affliction is improper, or that I labour under any real grievance, suffer it for one moment? 'Tis utterly impossible.—A God without a Providence is undoubtedly a contradiction. Nothing is plainer than that a Being of perfect reason will, in every instance, take such care of the universe as perfect reason requires. That supreme intelligence and love which are present to all things, and from whence all things sprung, must govern all occurrences, and exclude from the constitution of nature all real ill and disorder.

These

These considerations, it should be observed, prove what has been called a *particular* in opposition to a *general* Providence. We cannot conceive of any reasons that can influence the Deity, to exercise *any* providence over the world, which are not likewise reasons for extending it to *all* that happens in the world. As far as it is confined to generals, or overlooks *any* individual, or *any* event, it is incomplete, and therefore unsuitable to the idea of a perfect Being.

A great deal of very foolish ridicule has been thrown on this subject, and several objections have been made, which prove no more than the ignorance of those who make them. It will be proper here distinctly to take notice of some of these.

One common prejudice against this doctrine arises from the apprehension that it is below the dignity of the Deity to watch over, in the manner it implies, the meanest beings, and all the minutest affairs. In answer to this it may be observed, that a

great number of minute affairs, if they are each of them of *some* consequence, make up a sum which is of *great* consequence; and that there is no way of taking care of this sum, without taking care of each particular. Whatever events indeed are *wholly frivolous*, it would be absurd to suppose the Deity to concern himself about. Such events *want* no direction. They are *capable* of no direction. But, on the contrary, all events, not wholly frivolous, are proper objects of attention; and what would be really degrading to the universal parent is, not his watching over, but neglecting them. This objection, therefore, under the appearance of honouring God, plainly dishonours him. Nothing is absolutely trifling wherein the happiness of any individual, even the most insignificant, is at all concerned: nor is it beneath a wise and good Being to interpose in any thing of this kind. To suppose the Deity above this, is to suppose him above acting up to the full extent of goodness and rectitude.

The

The same eternal benevolence that first engaged him to produce beings, cannot but engage him likewise to exercise a particular providence over them ; and the very lowest beings, as well as the highest, seem to have a kind of right to his superintendency, from the very act of bringing them into existence. Every apprehension that this is too great a condescension in him, is founded on the poorest ideas ; for, surely, whatever it was not too great a condescension in him to *create*, it cannot be too great a condescension in him to *take care of**. It is proper

* ΑΛΛ' ὅς ὡς εὐτελῶν καταφρονεῖ τετῶν ἀπὲρ ἡξιώσε παραγαγεῖν, ὥστε κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ἀδύνατον μὴ προνοεῖσθαι ὑποθεῖ ταὺτ' αὐτὴ παραχθέντα. Sim. Comment. Cap. 38.

Some of the observations which have been made above, may be found also in Plato's well-known 10th Dialogue of Laws. In this dialogue, Plato teaches excellently that (since what is self-moving is, by its nature, *before* that which moves only in consequence of being moved) *mind* must be *prior* to *matter*, and the cause of all its modifications and changes, and that, therefore, there is an universal mind possessor of all perfection, which produced and which actuates all

per to add, that with respect to God all the distinctions of high and low in the creation vanish.

all things ——— *ἐκ γὰρ τῶν εἰρημενῶν οὐδ' ὅστιον ἄλλως λέγειν ἢ πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν ἔχουσαν ψυχὴν περιάγειν πάντα.* —After this he shews that the Deity exercises a particular providence over the world, taking care of small no less than great things. *Ὡς ἐπιμελεῖς σμικρῶν εἰσι θεοί, οὐχ ἡττοῦν ἢ τῶν μεγέθει διαφερόντων.* In proving this he observes, “that a superior nature of such
“excellence as the Divine, which hears, sees, and
“knows all things, cannot in any instance be sub-
“ject to negligence or sloth; that the meanest and
“the greatest parts of the world are all equally his
“work or possession: that great things cannot be
“rightly taken care of without taking care of small;
“and that, in all cases, the more able and per-
“fect any artist is, (as a physician, an architect, or
“the ruler of the state) the more his skill and care
“appear in little as well as great things. Let us
“not then (says he) conceive of God as worse than
“even mortal artists.” *Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνεὺ σμικρῶν τὰς μεγάλας φασιν οἱ λιθολογοὶ λιθοὺς εὖ κτισθαι: — μή τι γὰρ θεὸν ἀξιώσωμεν ποτε θνητῶν δημιουργῶν φαυλοτέραι: οἱ τὰ προσήκοντα αὐτοῖς ἔργα ὅσα περ' αὐτῶν ἀμεινότεροι: τοσῶ ἀκριβεστέρα καὶ τελειώτερα μίᾳ τέχνῃ σμικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἀπεργάζονται.* The chapter in *Simplicius* just quoted contains many observations similar to these, and well deserves to be consulted.

vanish. All beings are *infinitely*, that is, *equally*, inferior to him.

Another prejudice by which, probably, the minds of many are affected on this subject, arises from the notion, that it must be some trouble to the Deity to superintend and direct all the immense variety of events in the universe. It is not easy in this instance to avoid conceiving of God as like ourselves, and to remove all human imperfections from our ideas of him. We should study this as much as we can, and take care always to remember that the whole of possibility is alike easy to *infinite* power and knowledge; and that it is a contradiction to imagine that they can be ever encumbered or perplexed.

But the objection of most consequence is that taken from the supposed inconsistency of a particular providence with the liberty of reasonable agents and the general laws of the world. This objection may be seen excellently answered in *The Religion of Nature delineated*,

delineated, Sect. V. where it is shewn, how by secret influences on the minds of men ; by the introduction of different characters on the stage of the world at proper times, and in proper places ; by the ministry of invisible beings, and a suitable adjustment of physical and moral causes and events to one another, it may be possible, consistently with the laws of nature and the liberty of mankind, to direct all occurrences in such a manner, that nothing on the whole unfit to be allowed, or unsuitable to any case, shall come to pass.—In short : Concerning every event we may reason thus. Either it is of importance, or it is not. As far as it is not of importance, so far it is no object of concern to any being. As far, on the contrary, as it is of importance either in itself, or its circumstances, or on account of its influence on other events ; so far, as already observed, it is worthy of notice and regard, and it would imply imperfection in the administration of nature that the course of events should be so regulated as to admit it, supposing it on any account not proper to be admitted.

admitted.—The opinion that such a *particular* direction of events is not possible, without breaking in upon free agency and the laws of the universe, shews, I think, narrow views. It would, indeed, be impossible, if a man, for example, happens to be under a wall when it is falling, to prevent his being killed, without suspending the law of gravitation : But how easy would it have been, had his death at this particular time, and in this particular manner, been an event proper to be excluded, or which was not consistent with exact order and righteousness in the regulation of events ; how easy, I say, in this case, would it have been to hinder him from coming too near the dangerous place, or to occasion his coming sooner or later, by insensibly influencing the train of ideas in his mind, and in numberless other methods, which affect not his liberty. And since this was *easy* to be done, and yet *was* not done, we may assuredly conclude that it was not *right* to be done, and that the event did not happen with-

without the counsel and approbation of Providence. In general, every person whenever any event, favourable or unfavourable, happens to him, has the greatest reason to own the Divine hand in it; because, it appears, as far as we can judge, that had the Deity so pleased, it might have been prevented by a secret direction of natural causes, and of the thoughts of men, without offering any violence to them. How plainly may we perceive, that if we ourselves had a greater acquaintance with the powers of nature, and nearer access to the minds of men, we could easily over-rule and direct many events not at present in our power, agreeably to our own purposes, without the least infringement of the general laws of the world, or of the liberty of mankind? But how much easier must it be for that Being to do this absolutely and perfectly, to whom all the powers of nature are subject, who sees through all dependencies and connexions, and has constant access to the heart of every man, and can turn it whithersoever he pleases?

pleases *? Where then can be the difficulty of believing an invisible hand, an universal and ever-attentive Providence, which guides all things agreeably to perfect rectitude and wisdom; at the same time that the general laws of the world are left unviolated, and the liberty of moral agents is preserved?

With respect, particularly, to general laws, and the inconveniencies commonly supposed to be inseparable from them, we may conceive that none would be at first established which would produce any inconveniencies

* We are, I believe, more ignorant than is generally imagined of the manner in which ideas arise within us, and of the causes on which the succession of them in our minds depends. By this succession, the course of events in the world seems to be in a great measure determined; and he who had the complete management of it might give rise to almost any events he desired, at the same time that men went on to think, and judge, and act from themselves as they do now. But who can say how far it may be actually influenced by the suggestions of invisible beings, and particularly by the secret agency of the Supreme Spirit?

veniencies not right, all things considered, to be allowed : or, that such would be established whose inconveniencies might even become occasions of good, as the afflictions of human life have a tendency to bring men to sobriety and thoughtfulness, and to teach them some of the most important virtues. Or, supposing the inconveniencies arising from any necessary general laws to be in themselves absolute evils, we may conceive that there may be direction in various ways, with respect to the instances in which they shall happen ; or that remedies may be provided for them in the original constitution by particular secondary laws, as the inconveniencies attending the absence of the sun are remedied by the lights with which we can furnish ourselves in the night, or as the ill effects which would often arise from gravity and other natural causes, are prevented by the powers and instincts with which animals are endowed. It is, without doubt, absolutely necessary that natural causes should operate uniformly and steadily. Were they liable to frequent interruptions, the regularity

larity of nature would be destroyed; there would be no room for the exercise of prudence and foresight, and an universal inactivity would take place among reasonable beings. If then it should be true, that some evils are impossible to be separated by any methods from the uniform operation of any law of nature necessary to the general good, such evils only render this law so much less good, while yet it may be the best possible, and the impossibility of preventing them without greater harm, becomes itself a sufficient vindication of Providence in permitting them, and renders them entirely consistent with, nay *instances* of, a perfect order in the oeconomy of the universe.

In a word. It is self-evident that if there is *one* event in nature, of which all the care is not taken that is *right* to be taken, the administration of the world is *so far* defective, and the character of its author imperfect. It will be a contradiction to say, in answer to this, that there are causes and reasons,
C which

which render it not *possible* to take such care of *every* event; for the care *right* to be taken can be no other than all the care *possible* to be taken. It follows, therefore, that no one who believes a perfect Deity can deny a Providence, or doubt whether it is *particular*.

Lest I should not find a properer place, I shall beg leave to add here, as some presumption in favour of such a perfect order in nature as a particular Providence implies, that there is in *order* and *right* an essential tendency to get the ascendant over their contraries. They imply in their natures superior *force*, *stability*, and *permanency*; whereas, *confusion* and *wrong* as such are necessarily *weak*, *unstable*, and *self-destructive*. This alone, I think, might be sufficient to engage an attentive mind to believe, previously to any consideration of the actual state of the world, that the former rather than the latter, must be likely to be prevalent in it. But, perhaps, we may with reason proceed further in this way of thinking. The very
notion

notion that there is *any* circumstance in the course and administration of the world as it *should not* be, appears to me to be self-evidently incredible. It implies an impossibility like that of destroying space and duration; for it implies the non-existence of what cannot even in thought be destroyed; of *infinite, omnipotent, and everlasting reason and goodness*. While we conceive these to remain, (and otherwise we cannot conceive without a contradiction) we must believe that every thing repugnant to them, or not allowed by them, is excluded from nature*.—But let this be as it will. It seems to

* It would take up too much time as well as lead to a speculation too abstruse for the present discourse to explain my full meaning here, or to shew that we have an intuitive perception of the existence of *infinite, everlasting, omnipotent intelligence and rectitude*, which like eternity and immensity we cannot destroy, but remain after we have supposed them away, and the ideas of which are included in all our reasonings, and all our notions of truth and morality. I therefore only hint this argument, and leave the reader to judge of it as he pleases. See *Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals*, Chap. V.

to me, on the whole, scarcely more certain that events happen at all, than that they do not happen without the Providence of the Deity. As the maker and preserver of the world, he must take cognizance of whatever happens, and have an absolute dominion over it. Some determination, therefore, of his will there must be with respect to *every* event. His knowing that an event happens, and at the same time not interposing to prevent it, is a consent that it should happen; and as this *consent* must be founded on some reasons, it is the very same with exercising a providence over the event. This observation will have more weight if we add, that he foresaw the event before it happened, and yet was not pleased so to dispose things as to exclude it; or, that when he established the present system of nature, he knew that it would arise in consequence of his establishment, which yet he did not think fit to alter.—We ought to possess not much less than his omniscience to be able to comprehend the reasons which have guided, in every instance, the deter-

determinations of his providence. It should be enough to us to know that, whatever these reasons are, they must be worthy of infinite intelligence, or at least, of a piece with that perfection of wisdom and art which we see in the whole of the inanimate creation. But these observations I shall have occasion to resume in some of the following sections,

S E C T. II.

Of the arguments for Providence from the general laws and constitution of the world.

IT has been shewn in the preceding section, that the perfect character of the Deity cannot be maintained without allowing an all-directing and unerring Providence. It would have been taking much too large a compass to enter, on this occasion, into an account of the evidence for the Divine perfections. 'Tis sufficient if it appears that the doctrine of Providence rests on the same foundation with them, and follows from them. There is, however, one objection here, of which it will be proper to take some notice. It may be said, "that our only
" evidence for the Divine perfections is
" taken from what we observe of their ef-
" fects in the frame of nature, and that there-
" fore to infer from these perfections any
" greater

“ greater order and wisdom in the admini-
 “ stration of nature than we can actually
 “ observe, is to suppose greater perfection in
 “ the Deity than can be proved, and the
 “ same with first determining the properties
 “ of the cause by the effect, and then de-
 “ termining the properties of the effect by
 “ the cause.”

In answer to this I would observe, 1st,
 that it is not true that our whole evidence
 for the Divine perfections is taken from the
 frame of nature. The discoveries of rea-
 son, however they may be preceded by ob-
 servation and experience, and take their rise
 from them ; transcend them infinitely ; and
 in many instances force us to receive truths
 which they are incapable of suggesting *.

But,

* I am under a necessity of referring again to the
Review of the principal Questions and Difficulties in
Morals, Chap. 1st and 10th, where I have endeavoured
 to prove all that is here asserted. The works of
 creation *demonstrate* that the Creator is possessed of
 power and intelligence. That he possesses them *in the*
highest possible degree, follows from his nature as an un-

But, 2dly, supposing that our whole knowledge of the Deity must be derived from what we see of this works, it will not follow that we ought to ascribe to him only just that precise degree of the perfections we believe him to possess, which is equal to what we can comprehend of their effects in the contrivance and order of the world. This would imply, that we ought never to infer from any *data* more than they immediately contain, and therefore would put an end

caused Being. Whatever qualities such a Being has, he must have *necessarily*, and, therefore, in their source and in infinity. This is capable of the strictest proof, and must, I fancy, appear to every one who has just views of this subject. The *perfect intelligence* of the Deity being in this way discovered, it will follow that he is possessed of *perfect benevolence and rectitude*; for these are included in perfect intelligence; as, I think, is shewn in the treatise just referred to. And thus, on the principles maintained in that treatise, the complete idea of *Deity*, consisting of infinite *power, intelligence, and goodness* essentially united, will be established; and this being established, the doctrine of an unerring providence guiding all events, or of a perfect order in nature will be likewise established, as is shewn in the preceding section.

end to all reasoning.—The cause must always have in himself, in a *greater* degree, those perfections which he communicates.

It would be easy to shew that from the works of creation we have reason to infer a much higher degree of power, wisdom and goodness in the Creator than they directly exhibit; and therefore it will be right in this case, first to argue upwards from the effect, as a foundation for proving the perfections of the cause, and then back again from the cause thus discovered to the effect. Thus, in natural philosophy, by reasoning from particular facts we gain the knowledge of the general laws which obtain in nature, and afterwards apply these laws to the explanation of other facts which could not otherwise have been accounted for. For instance; from the fact that gravity is the power which keeps the moon in her orbit, is inferred the general law of gravitation, by the help of which the whole order of the solar system is laid open to us, and all the motions of the bodies that compose it explained.

plained. How absurd would it be to object in this instance, that no conclusion can be drawn from any facts which will prove any greater degree of regularity in nature than these facts themselves exhibit, or which can be rightly used to explain any other facts, about which we can make no experiments?

It is proper to add, 3dly, that we actually see that nature is the effect of such wisdom as surpasses our highest conceptions. We know this in numberless instances; and the same wisdom that takes place in these instances, we are unavoidably led to apply to other instances where it is not seen, and to the whole administration of events. It will, I hope, appear hereafter that this is an observation of particular weight on this subject of Providence. In the mean time, it is necessary that I should enter upon some topics of a different nature.

The design of this section is to give an account of such arguments for Providence
as

as may be gathered from considering the general laws and constitution of the world.

In order to be as explicit as I can on this head, I shall beg leave to observe, first, that it appears undeniably that there is a plan of nature settled, which determines *in general* the *course* of events. A particular order of causes and effects is maintained regularly and steadily. Laws have been established which operate invariably. Many different classes of creatures have been brought into existence, and placed in circumstances adapted to their different natures, and all provided for suitably to their wants and exigencies. The world, therefore, has not been left to fluctuate fortuitously. There is a care taken of it, and a direction given to its affairs.—But this does not come up to what I have here chiefly in view.—It is evident not only that there is a plan or constitution of nature by which beings are provided for, and a general direction given to events; but that there is an influence of the Deity constantly exerted to main-

maintain this constitution. — In other words; it may be proved “that the Deity
“is always *present* and always *active* in all
“places; and that his energy is the *first*
“mover in every motion, and the true
“source of all the powers and laws which
“take place in the material world.” —
To this conclusion all true philosophy leads
us; and it is a point so closely connected
with the main purpose of this Dissertation,
that I shall make it the subject of particular
examination.

Much labour has been employed by some
persons to account for all the phænomena
of nature by the powers of mechanism, or,
the necessary laws of matter and motion.
But it seems indisputable that this cannot be
done. The *primary causes* of things must,
certainly, be some powers or principles not
mechanical. For let it be granted that
any particular effect is owing to the im-
pulse of other matter on that in which the
effect is observed; it may be asked, what
gives motion to this other matter. If it is
answered,

answered, the impulse of some *third* matter ; it may be again asked, whence this third matter derives its motion. And thus, whatever number of intermediate steps there may be, we must at last come to some matter that did not receive its motion from the impulse of other matter ; or to some immechanical cause.——This reasoning can no way be evaded, but by either maintaining an endless progression of motions communicated from matter to matter, without any *first mover* ; or by saying, that the first impelling matter moved itself.——The former is an absurdity too great to be embraced by any one ; and there is reason to hope, that the essential inactivity of matter is at present so well understood, that there can be but few who will care to assert the latter.——All our reasonings about bodies and the whole of Natural philosophy are founded on the three laws of motion, laid down by Sir Isaac Newton at the beginning of the *Principia*. These laws express the plainest truths ; but they would have neither evidence nor meaning, were not inactivity contained in our idea of matter. I know

I know it will be said, that matter, though naturally inert, may be made to be otherwise by Divine power. But this is the same with saying, that matter may be made not to be matter. If inactivity belongs to it at all, it must belong to it *as* matter, or solid extension, and therefore must be inseparable from it*. The natures of things are necessarily what they are, independently of all power. Matter is *figured, moveable, discerptible, inactive*, and capable of communicating motion by impulse to other matter, just as the four sides of a square and its diagonal are *incommensurable*; that is, not by *will*, but by *essence*. These are not *accidental* but *primary* qualities of matter. Besides; matter void of inactivity, supposing it possible, could produce no effects. 'Tis only in consequence of this property that it is capable of giving motion to other matter, or of answering any purpose. Were, therefore, the first impelling

* See the *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*, Sect. I. No. 15, 24, 26, 27.

ling matter before mentioned divested of its *inertia*, or endowed with a principle of self-motion, it would be utterly unfitted for the end assigned it. What is now asserted will perhaps be evident, and the impossibility of matter without *inertia* appear more plainly upon considering particularly what would happen on the collision of such matter with other matter of the same, or of a different kind.

We know nothing of matter, and can determine nothing about it, if it is not true that it must yield to every impulse upon it in proportion to the force impressed, and that the motion *communicated* by every impulse is always equal to that *lost* by the impelling body and cannot be either greater or less ; or, in other words, that it is endowed with *resistance*, and absolutely and entirely *passive* *. But nothing like this can
be

* What I mean here when expressed more accurately is, that a *change of state* is always produced in the body impelling, equal to that produced in the
body

be true on the supposition of active or unresisting matter.——For let a mass of such matter be conceived to strike another mass of inactive matter at rest. I ask what would happen? Not the moving of that at rest. For the impelling body having no resistance, or no tendency to *continue* in any state of motion or rest, it can have nothing like *force*, and therefore can produce no effect. —Shall it then pass through or penetrate the body at rest, and go on to move as if nothing stood in its way?—This also is impossible, or we have no idea at all of matter as a *solid* substance, or as something distinct from mere extension.—’Tis certain then that its motion must be stopped,
but

body impelled. In *composition* of motion, or when one body strikes another body in motion obliquely, there is always motion lost; because some of the force of the impelling body must be spent in merely altering the direction of the other; though even here, as well as in the *resolution* of motion where, for the same reason, motion is always gained, the general rule holds, that the *sum* of the motions *the same way*, and the *difference* of the motions *contrary ways*, are always the same before and after collision.

but without communicating the least motion to the body at rest, or having the least effect upon it. That is, an effect will be produced without a cause: For the body at rest not having received any alteration of its state, it could not have *re-acted* or been the means of altering the state of the other.— There is no way of avoiding these contradictions but by saying, what is too ridiculous to deserve any answer; that the moving body had the sagacity to exert its activity to stop itself the very instant it came into contact with the other.

But again; let us on the other hand, suppose a body of inactive matter, (that is, of such matter as we commonly reason about and is the only subject of the laws of mechanism) to move towards another body of self-moving and unresisting matter, and to impel it in the very direction in which it tends to move itself. Now 'tis certain that having an *innate tendency* or *endeavour* to move in this direction, it cannot *resist* motion in this direction, and that

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there-

therefore the first body without being reacted upon, or having its own state in any manner altered by the impulse, would carry it along with the same velocity with which itself moves. Nay, the first body, though ever so small, would, in the circumstances supposed, communicate any motion though ever so great to any mass or masses of matter, without losing any motion itself, that is, without meeting with any *obstruction*, or acting at all on the matter moved. And thus any effect may be produced by the most inadequate cause, or rather by no cause at all.

Once more; let a collision be conceived to happen between two equal bodies both composed of matter without *inertia*, moving in contrary directions. As one of them cannot be conceived to penetrate the other, the result must be, that both shall be stopped, but by nothing; for both wanting that property on account of which we say of matter, that when once in motion it will persevere in motion, unless something stops it, or having no power of resistance, neither
of

of them can be any obstruction to the motion of the other *.

But

* The *resistance of matter* is an expression that must be used in speaking on this subject for want of a better; but there is some danger of misunderstanding it. The meaning of it is not that matter makes any *opposition* to a change of its state, or exerts a force to maintain itself in the state it is in, as some have very improperly expressed themselves. This would imply that very activity which I have endeavoured to shew to be inconsistent with its nature; and were it true, a part of the force of every impulse would be spent merely in overcoming this opposition without producing any other effect; and therefore the sum of the motions the same way would be always greater before than after collision, which is impossible. The *largest* body will be moved by any the *slightest* impulse of the *smallest*; but then it can be moved only in proportion to the force of the impulse; and this is what is chiefly meant by the *resistance* of matter. For instance. A body at rest will *resist* another which is moving towards it; that is, it will be an *obstruction* to the motion of this other. The latter will be retarded by the former, and will lose just as much motion as it communicates. — In other words. The *resistance* of matter is that in its nature which makes it require an *adequate foreign* cause of every change of state, or from whence it

But the impossibility of all active qualities or tendencies in matter may be proved
in

is *wholly passive*, and incapable of receiving any motion from impulse that is not in a certain fixed proportion to the *relative momentum* of the impelling body, and strictly equal to the change of state it suffers in consequence of the impulse. In this proportion matter is always moved *without difficulty*; but beyond this there is not only a *difficulty* but an *impossibility* of moving it; and whatever motion it can be supposed to receive from any impulse that is greater than that which the impelling body loses, it must derive from nothing at all.

I have spoken above of the *force* of matter and of its *acting*, at the same time that I have asserted it not to be *active*. An attentive and candid reader cannot think this an inconsistency. The activity denied to matter is a power of changing its own state, not that of acting upon other matter by *impulse*. This sort of activity or power follows from and is necessarily implied in its perfect passiveness or *inertia*.

Since the first edition of this work I have found much the same observations with those now made on the resistance of matter in an Essay, entitled, *Remarks on the laws of motion and the inertia of matter*, by Dr. Stewart, Professor of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh, published in the first Volume of the Edinburgh Physical Essays.—I have found in other instances a confor-

in a way still more direct and decisive.—

Let it be supposed that a body now at rest has an innate tendency to move. This tendency must produce its effect either by a *gradual acceleration* in the manner gravity acts; or by instantaneously producing that particular degree of motion which satisfies it, and then ceasing.——

In the former case; the tendency to acceleration being the same with a tendency to a constant change of velocity, and this being a *permanent* quality in the body, no particular motion derived from it can have the least *duration*, but must be given and destroyed at one and the same moment, and therefore nothing could be done.—In other words; such a tendency is a tendency to an infinity of different velocities at once, and therefore is impossible.——Neither can motion be acquired in the latter way;

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for

mity between the observations in that excellent Essay and some that follow, which gives me pleasure, and confirms me in thinking, that there are few points better proved, than that which is the subject of this section from p. 27 to p. 52.

for motion so acquired no force could destroy, because at the very instant it is *destroyed* it must be *acquired* in consequence of the supposed tendency. No impulse, therefore, can without a contradiction be supposed to have any effect upon the motion of such a body; and though ever so small, it would carry before it all the bodies of the world if in its way, without being itself retarded. And were two such bodies, moving in contrary directions, to meet, since neither could be stopped, they must either penetrate one another, or be annihilated.

It is easy to see that the same way of arguing may be used to prove, that there can be no innate tendency in matter, when in motion, to a state of rest.—Matter naturally preserves the motion once impressed upon it, just as it does its figure; and were not this true, it would not be possible that any force should give it motion, for the effect of such force not being capable of remain-
ing

ing *any* time, it would be lost as soon as gained: that is, no effect would be produced.

These are observations which I am persuaded, no person can duly attend to without feeling the weight of them. Nothing, surely, can be more repugnant to our ideas of matter than self-motion; nor is there any conclusion which there is much more reason to rely upon than that it is not a subject capable of any *spontaneous powers*, and therefore must owe every change that can happen in it to some *foreign* influence.

This conclusion will be further confirmed if we consider what naturally offers itself in the next place, and what must not be omitted on this argument, that self-moving matter must have thought and design. Whenever matter moves it must move in some particular direction, and with some precise degree of velocity; and there be-

ing an infinity of these equally possible, it cannot move itself without selecting one of these out of the rest, or determining itself to one of them exclusively of all the others, and therefore not without design.—But this is not all. It may be plainly proved that matter cannot be the *ultimate* cause of the *phænomena* of nature, or the agent, which, by any powers inherent in itself, produces the general laws of nature without possessing the highest degree of knowledge, and wisdom.—Let us, as a proper instance to reason upon here, take the particular law of gravitation. The true account, I say, of this law cannot be any innate propensities of matter to motion or its uniformly moving itself according to stated rules. For in order to observe these rules, every particle of it must be able to conform itself to all the different situations it can be in, and therefore must know the precise *distances*, *magnitudes*, and *number* of all the surrounding parts of matter; these being the circumstances
which

which universally determine the force and direction of gravity. Thus; if a particle of matter on the surface of the earth tends towards the earth by its own energy, and without any foreign influence upon it, with that precise degree of velocity, and in that precise direction which the law of gravitation requires, it must, in order to this, know the precise *figure* and *bulk* of the earth, and its *situation* upon it, since the smallest variation in any one of these particulars will alter the velocity and direction of its motion. When placed *within* the surface it must diminish its own force at different distances from the center, in the *simple direct ratio* of these distances. When placed *without* the surface, it must diminish its own force in the *inverse, duplicate* ratio of its distances from the center. When carried to the center of gravity between the moon and the earth, it must determine itself to rest. When carried beyond this, it must determine its motion towards the moon, and not
the

the earth.—Is it possible that matter should vary its own motions in a manner thus wonderful ; infomuch that all the different parts of it appear to act in perfect concert with one another for producing the order of nature, and bringing about the best ends * ? The following argument will I believe, shew that there is not less than the evidence of demonstration against the possibility of this.—Nothing can *know* or *act* where it is not. The presence and activity of every particle of matter are confined to that particular part of space it fills up. Were it ever so intelligent or active it could *know* nothing, it could *do* nothing beyond this. How then can it be so acquainted with the state of bodies at the greatest distance from it, and no way connected with it, as to be able to act in concert with them and to move itself in exact conformity to their situation and numbers † ?

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* See Dr. Stewart's Essay, quoted, p. 36.

† “ It is inconceivable that inanimate brute matter should, without the mediation of something
“ else,

What has been said of gravitation might with equal evidence be proved concerning any more general cause, of which possibly gravitation may be only an effect; such as Sir Isaac Newton's *Æther*, or whatever other mediums or powers may exist, and be the real *primary* causes of the phænomena of the world. The elasticity, for example, of such an *æther* as Sir Isaac Newton has described, supposing it to exist, must be derived, not from any powers of self-motion in the matter

“ else, which is not material, operate upon and affect
 “ other matter without mutual contact, as it must
 “ be, if gravitation be essential and inherent in it.
 “ And this is one reason why I desired you would not
 “ ascribe innate gravity to me. That gravity should
 “ be innate, inherent, and essential to matter, so
 “ that one body may act upon another at a distance
 “ through a *vacuum*, without the mediation of any
 “ thing else, by and through which their action and
 “ force may be conveyed from one to another, is to
 “ me so great an absurdity, that I believe no man who
 “ has in philosophical matters a competent faculty of
 “ thinking, can ever fall into it.” See the *Third of the
 Four Letters from Sir Isaac Newton to Dr. Bently*, printed for Mr. Doddsley.

matter of this *æther*, but from the constant agency upon it of an intelligent and omnipresent spirit*.

To assert that matter can conform its own motions in the manner requisite to produce

* “In our enquiries into nature” (says an excellent philosopher) “we are always meeting with powers that surpass mere mechanism, or the effects of matter and motion. The laws of nature are constant and regular, and for aught we know all of them may be resolved into one general and extensive power; but this power itself derives its properties and efficacy not from mechanism, but in a great measure from the immediate influences on the first mover.” *Mr. Macklaurin’s Account of Sir Isaac Newton’s Discoveries*, Book IV. ch. 9. §. 12.——

“Later philosophers frame hypotheses for explaining all things mechanically; whereas, the main business of natural philosophy is to argue from phænomena without framing hypotheses, and to deduce causes from effects till we come to the very first cause which certainly is not mechanical.” *Newton’s Opticks*, Query 28.——

“*Causæ simplicissimæ nulla dari potest mechanica explicatio: si daretur enim, causa nondum esset simplicissima.*” *Mr. Cotes’s Preface to Newton’s Principia.*

produce and maintain those general laws of nature on which the world depends, is indeed but little better than direct atheism, or resolving ultimately the whole order and contrivance of the world into matter and motion. ——— Some good men, however, have been strangely deceived on this subject, by confused notions of the Divine power to plant laws in matter, or to indue it with certain active principles * and tendencies, in virtue of which it shall of itself, and independently of any immediate external influence upon it, *execute* the plan at first laid by infinite wisdom, and *continue* the form and order of the universe. But they could never have entertained any such opinion, had they attended in a proper manner to that *inertia* of matter before explained, by which it is as incapable of changing its own state with respect

* “The great author of all things (Mr. Derham “says) has *inspirited* the materials of which the “world consists with the *active quality* called *gravity*.” *Astro-Theology*, Book VI. ch. 3.

respect to rest and motion as its own figure ; or had they considered that if matter, *by its own proper agency*, produces the laws, and keeps up the regularity of nature, it is a subject naturally capable of those powers whereby it does this, and might as well have at first disposed itself into the form and order of the universe *.

It

* 'Tis worth observing that the reasoning here used holds with equal force against a notion that has been embraced and defended by some great men, but which is totally unworthy of them ; I mean the notion of a *plastic nature*, or certain *vital* and *spiritual*, but *unintelligent* and *necessary* agent which the Deity is supposed to have created to carry on under himself his scheme, and to produce the various effects and phænomena of nature.——If an unintelligent agent can act with such uniformity, and yet so variously, as to produce the order of the world, and govern its motions ; if, for instance, it can frame the bodies of plants and animals, or so direct its own action as to impel the particles of matter towards one another, in such different directions, and with such different forces in different situations, as to be the constant cause of those laws and powers which obtain in the corporeal universe, and on which depend its form and being ; If, I say, this is possible,

It has been also often objected “that
“it is impairing the beauty of the
“world,

sible, there is an end of all our reasonings about causes and effects, and of all arguments for design and intelligence in the author of nature, taken from its regularity and beauty.—It avails nothing to say, that this agent acts in subordination to the Deity, and only in virtue of powers given it by him. For it is not supposed to be merely an instrument in the hands of the Deity which never acts except in consequence of being first acted upon; but what it does it is supposed to do properly by a power inherent in itself, without wanting any *immediate* direction from the Deity; and the very reasons that have been assigned for supposing such an agent, are, that it is absurd to think that the Deity should be continually employed so much in vain, as is necessary to be supposed, if the general laws of the world are derived from his agency; and that it is dishonouring him to conceive of him as acting himself continually on matter, and immediately concerned in framing the bodies of the meanest plants and insects.—To as little purpose is it to say, that omnipotence can give such a power to an unintelligent agent: for what has not wisdom *cannot* act wisely, and no power can make that to be, which *cannot* be. If the Deity can make a cause that acts without knowledge or design to produce
regular

“ world, and representing it as a pro-
 “ duction more imperfect than any
 “ work

regular effects; then it is in the nature of things possible for *such* a cause to produce *such* effects; then design in the cause is not *necessary* to the greatest conceivable order and regularity in the effect, nor can we *certainly* infer the one from the other: then, in short, any thing may produce any thing, and no conclusion with respect to the cause can be drawn, in any case, from what we see in the effect.——

The effects of habits have been very improperly alleged, as affording instances of regular action without knowledge of design. For, what is done by habits, is, I think, always done in consequence of some volition or direction of the mind; and our not being conscious of it is in reality no more than not remembering it, the whole effect of a habit on the executive powers consisting in their more easy and ready compliance with the dictates of the mind. But not to insist on this; let it be granted that regular actions are frequently performed in consequence of habits without thought or design; this, if true, must be owing to certain powers and laws of the animal œconomy which must be accounted for in the same manner with other powers and laws which obtain in nature, and cannot be made an argument for such a blind plastic force as has been contended for,

“ work of human art, to maintain that
 “ it cannot subsist of itself, or that it
 “ requires the hand of its maker to be
 “ always at it to continue its motions
 “ and order.”

The full answer to this objection is, that to every machine or perpetual movement for answering any particular purpose, there always belongs some *first mover*, some *weight* or *spring*, or other power which is continually acting upon it, and from which all its motions are derived: Nor, without such a power, is it possible to conceive of any such

for, without begging the question. — See the truly great and learned Dr. Cudworth's *Intellectual System*, Book I. Chap. 3. where the opinion on which I have made these remarks is particularly explained and defended. See also an account of a controversy which it occasioned between Mr. Bayle and Le Clerc, in the account of the life and writings of Dr. Cudworth, prefixed to the second edition of the *Intellectual System* by Dr. Birch. — Dr. Henry More and Dr. Grew have likewise maintained this opinion.

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machine.

machine. The machine of the universe then, like all besides analogous to it of which we have any idea, must have a *first mover*. Now, it has, I think, been demonstrated, that this first mover cannot be matter itself. It follows, therefore, that this objection is so far from being of any force, that it leads us to the very conclusion which it is brought to overthrow.——The excellence of a machine by no means depends on its going properly *of itself*, for this is impossible; but on the skill with which its various parts are adjusted to one another, and all its different effects are derived from the *constant action* of some power —— What would, indeed, make a machine appear imperfect and deformed is, assigning a separate power to every distinct part, without allowing any place for mechanism. And, in like manner, what would really make the frame of nature appear imperfect and deformed is, resolving phenomena too soon to the Divine agency, or supposing it the *immediate*

diate cause of every particular effect. But every one must see that what I have been pleading for is not this, but only, that however far mechanism may be carried and the chain of causes extend in the material universe, to the Divine Power exerted continually in all places, every law and every effect and motion in it must be *at last* resolved.—This is a conclusion which the modern improvements in natural philosophy have abundantly confirmed, and which some of the first and best philosophers have received; nor can that philosophy be otherwise than little and contemptible which hides the Deity from our views, which excludes him from the world, or does not terminate in the acknowledgment and adoration of him as the maker, preserver, and ruler of all things*.

The

* “The philosopher who overlooks the traces of
“an all-governing Deity in nature, contenting him-
“self with the appearances of the material universe
“only, and the mechanical laws of motion, neglects

The point on which I have been insisting is of so much importance that no apology can be necessary for dwelling so long upon it.—What has been said has a tendency to give an attentive mind the deepest sense of the dependence of the creation on the Deity; for it shews us that he is properly the *life* of it, the *infinite Spirit* by which it is informed and sustained; that all material causes are no more than instruments in his hand, and that from him their efficacy is derived; and

“ what is most excellent; and prefers what is
 “ imperfect to what is supremely perfect, finitude to
 “ infinity, what is narrow and weak to what is
 “ unlimited and almighty, and what is perishing to
 “ what endures for ever.” *Mr. Maclaurin’s Account*
of Sir Isaac Newton’s Discoveries, Book IV. Ch. 9.
 Sect. 1.—“ Sir Isaac Newton thought it most
 “ unaccountable to exclude the Deity *only* out of the
 “ universe. It appeared to him much more just
 “ and reasonable to suppose that the whole chain of
 “ causes, or the several series of them, should center
 “ in him as their source; and the whole system
 “ appear depending on him the only independent
 “ cause.” *Ibid.* Sect. 5.

and that so far is he from being an idle spectator of what happens, that were he, for one instant, to suspend his agency, universal confusion would take place, and all nature fall to pieces.

I need not say how irresistible the evidence is which arises from hence for the doctrine of Providence.—What it may be of most importance to recommend to notice in this place is the following observation.—It has been proved that the Deity pervades and actuates the whole material world, and that his unremitting energy is the cause to which every effect in it must be traced. Now, the *spiritual* world is, without doubt, of greater consequence. Is his energy then wanting here? Is there not *one atom of matter* on which he does not act; and is there then *one living Being* about which he has no concern? Does not a *stone fall* without him; and does then a *man suffer* without him? Are such influences as may be necessary to bring about a just

regulation of events in the moral world, less likely than those influences which we know to be exerted continually to maintain the order of the inanimate world?

——The truth is, the inanimate world is of *no* consequence abstracted from its subserviency to the animate and reasonable world. The former, therefore, must be preserved and governed entirely with a view to the latter*.

This leads me to a further argument on this subject, which has, I think, considerable weight, and seems greatly to strengthen the conclusion I would establish.

——This argument has been hinted already, but it is necessary that it should be here brought more particularly to view. It offers itself to us upon considering the wisdom manifested in the structure of every

* I have not mentioned here the constant exertion of Divine power in maintaining the succession of vegetables, and in producing men, and other beings, because particular notice of it will be taken hereafter.

every object in the inanimate creation. How fair is the form of every vegetable, and how curiously arranged its parts? What a profusion of beauty and elegance seems to be wasted away in woods and wildernesses, where no eye ever observes them? What exquisite mechanism, what nice workmanship and amazing art appear in every leaf and spire of grass?——Let us now ask ourselves; has God, in the *lowest* of his works, been thus *lavish* of wisdom, beauty, and skill, and is he *sparing* of these in the concerns of *reasonable* beings? or does he less regard order, propriety, and fitness in the determination of their states?——It is not possible to imagine this.——Whatever appearance the affairs of men may at present make to us, we may be certain that they are directed by the same wisdom with that which we observe in the rest of nature; that is, by a wisdom which we know to be infinitely superior to ours; by a wisdom, which, in the meanest objects, is exact and incomprehensible, and which

therefore, must be as much more so, in higher objects, as they are of greater value.———To this purpose in a great measure is the reasoning we find in Matt. vi. 28, &c. *Why take ye thought for rayment? Consider the lillies of the field how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin; and yet, I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?*

There is not indeed any thing which has a much greater tendency to give relief to a mind earnestly wishing to be satisfied of a wise superintendency of all that befalls it, than to contemplate the curious organization of any flower or herb

herb of the field, and the attention bestowed on even its outward figure; and then to consider whether it is probable, that the Being who so wonderfully wrought *such* a substance, can neglect any *intelligent* creature, or be inattentive to any circumstance of his existence; whether he who has with perfect exactness adjusted the parts of dead matter to one another in the most *trifling plant*, must not be proportionably exact in what is of infinitely greater moment, the adjustment of pleasure and pain to a *human soul*. — Or, let such a person fix his thoughts on the structure of his body, and consider, whether it is credible that he who has so *fearfully* made this, and displayed such unspeakable wisdom in adjusting and regulating every particle of matter that composes it; has not displayed proportionable wisdom in the structure of his mind, or is not proportionably careful in adapting events to its case, and in regulating whatever it feels. — To say no more. If unerring wisdom shews itself in the direction
and

and government of *corporeal* nature, and all its parts are ordered in number, weight, and measure, so that the more we know of it, the more we are forced to admire it; if its meanest works are finished with complete accuracy, and the whole system appears harmonious and grand in the highest possible degree; what harmony, what wisdom and goodness may we well reckon upon in the government of the intellectual world? What care and accuracy in disposing the lots of the individuals of it? How grand must be its plan, and how perfect its order?

S E C T. III.

Of the manner in which Providence is administered.

WHAT has been hitherto said contains a brief view of the principal arguments for the doctrine of a righteous and all wise Providence. My design in this section is to offer a few observations relating to the mode of administering it.

I have frequently in the preceding sections spoken on the supposition, that a perfect direction of events is brought about by the Divine influence, immediately and constantly exerted every where for that purpose. It must however be remembered that this is a point about which all are not agreed. Many wise
and

and good men are strongly prejudiced against the supposition, that there have been any interpositions of Divine Power since the creation in directing affairs, as implying an impotence, unskilfulness, and operoseness unworthy of infinite wisdom. They, therefore, chuse to conceive of the laws and order of the material world, as having been at first adjusted in exact correspondence to what should happen in the moral world, and the whole scheme including all events as originally designed and laid in the best manner, and now continually going on to open an unfold itself agreeably to the Divine idea, without any occasion for any interpositions.——As far as such maintain the same perfect direction of affairs in consequence of an *original* establishment, as is commonly supposed to be brought about by *constant* influences, they maintain all that we have reason to be anxious about on the present subject. And this, indeed, I should imagine, it must be impossible for any one who has
just

just notions of the Divine perfections to avoid maintaining, let him think on this subject in other respects as he pleases. For thus we may argue. — When the Deity at first fixed the present plan of nature, and gave Beings their different powers and affections, he either had a perfect foresight of the whole train of events that would arise in consequence of his establishment, or he had not. — If he had this fore-knowledge, the events fore-known were either all of them such as he saw it would be properest to leave as fore-known, or they were not. If the affirmative is asserted; it is all I plead for. Every event in this case will be just such as perfect rectitude is pleased either to *make* it, or to *suffer* it to be. — But, on the contrary, if amongst the fore-known events there were any which it was on any account right or proper to exclude; on this supposition, a good theist, who rejects all *occasional interpositions*, must of necessity say, that the original plan would have been so altered as to
exclude

exclude these events, and to produce a complete coincidence of all that should happen with the counsels and designs of infinite wisdom and goodness. This cannot be avoided while the existence of infinite wisdom and goodness in nature is believed; and thus the doctrine of Providence in its highest sense will still be asserted.

But if an exact fore-knowledge of all actions and events, and such a perfect original establishment in consequence of it, as I have mentioned, are thought by any to be impossible; and if, for this reason, no more is supposed than that powers were given to beings, and general laws settled, and then events suffered to arise as they would, without any particular care or superintendency exercised over them; in this case, the doctrine of Providence will be intirely rejected: And if such sentiments are true, the universe is a chaos; the character of the parent of it is imperfect; all trust in
him,

him, and supplications to him are absurd, and no part of practical religion has any good foundation.—But after what has been before said, I hope I may be allowed to take it for granted, that these sentiments are not true, and that there is indeed a perfect direction of all events. —The point I am now considering is, in what manner this is accomplished; and it has probably been already seen in some measure why I chuse to conceive of it as produced by constant influences, rather than such an original establishment as I have mentioned. —It will appear to some, that an original establishment, answering this purpose, implies universal fatalism, and, that in events happening amongst reasonable agents, there must be infinite variations and uncertainties not possible to be regulated by it. But be this as it will; it must, I think, be difficult for an attentive person to persuade himself, that the other method of administering Providence is not the most capable of bringing about
a perfect

a perfect regulation of events. And if this should be true; or, if any purposes of wisdom and goodness may be answered by constant influences, which could not at all, or not so well, have been answered in any other way, we may be satisfied that there really are such influences: And to assert the contrary from a prejudice against them as not regular, or not becoming the Deity, seems in the highest degree unreasonable. Can it be irregular to produce the highest regularity, or unbecoming the Deity to govern the universe and its affairs in such a manner as is most agreeable to the ends for which he created it? Will he sacrifice the highest order to the lowest; or suffer events to arise at random in the world, rather than at any time put forth his hand to direct them? Must he have been only looking on ever since the creation; and is *this* what is most becoming him?

Some, probably, are led into mistakes on this subject, by thinking of the manner

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ner in which it is most becoming the Deity to act, too strictly in conformity to that in which men are obliged to act. They have but little power, and therefore are obliged to be as frugal of it as possible. But there is nothing difficult to the Deity, and consequently there can be nothing to influence him to chuse one way of acting rather than another, besides, its being more agreeable to rectitude, and more conducive to his end. And this likewise is, in reality, the most beautiful way of acting. Beauty consists chiefly in the proper and effectual adaptation of means to ends. For this reason, those means are the most beautiful, and those systems the best, which best answer their end.——In mere natural order, abstracted from all use, there is nothing valuable; and the very reason why the Deity has chosen to establish a course of nature is, the necessity of it as a means to produce happiness, and to give his reasonable creatures room for a proper

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exertion

exertion of their faculties, and for the practice of virtue.

These observations seem to me of importance on the present subject; but, without having recourse to them, it must surely be very evident, that influences, consistent with the free agency of beings and uniformly exerted to exclude every event fit to be excluded, and to produce perfect order in the administration of the world, are so far from unbecoming the almighty and omnipresent parent, that we can conceive of nothing more worthy of him, or that can make his character appear more amiable. Nor is there any more reason to be prejudiced against them, than against the influence which the constitution of the world allows to every agent over events, in proportion to his power and knowledge. There is no person who does not influence in various ways what passes within the circle of his friends and acquaintance, and it has never yet been thought that the liberty of mankind,

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or their scope for action is affected by it. Invisible and superior Beings may also be frequently employed in directing occurrences among mankind. Now, the influence of Divine Providence is a fact of the same kind with these, and seems not to be on any account more liable to objections. Shall we acknowledge the influence of *every* agent on events, and deny that of the *Supreme*? Was it indeed fit that by one original act he should exclude himself from all further concern with his works; or can it be possible to imagine that the Being who is the fountain of all energy, and whose nature is perfect activity and power, should be the *only* inactive Being in the universe? Is it not, on the contrary, much more rational to believe, that his influence over events extends as much further than that of any other Being, and is as much more constant, as the relation in which he stands to beings is nearer, and his power and wisdom greater?

In short; the notion of an *almighty* Being, *perfectly benevolent*, observing the affairs of his own offspring, and yet never exerting any influence to give them that direction which he most approves, must, I should think, appear too inconsistent and absurd not to shock every attentive and unprejudiced person.——With respect, however, to the analogy I have just mentioned between Divine Providence and the influence of created agents, it is necessary to observe, that it should be considered with some caution. We shall here be in great danger of deceiving ourselves, if we judge of what the Deity should do, by what we ought to do. It is our duty to exclude, as far as we can, all vice and sufferings from the world; and because this is not done by the Deity, who has all hearts in his hands, and an unlimited power over events, some have questioned whether he at all directs events, or concerns himself about us. But happy is it for the world that it is

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not governed in the manner in which human wisdom would govern it. From what is incumbent on us in our circumstances, we cannot by any means infer what, in this instance, it is proper for the Deity to do as supreme governor*. We are too much unacquainted with his counsels and plan to be able to determine this. Undoubted fact proves that the

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* A teacher of religion who had the power by his instructions and persuasions to engage men effectually to virtue would be inexcusable as far as he neglected this. But it seems that Jesus Christ could have so spoken to men, and so influenced their hearts, as to render his ministry more successful than it was. He tells us, that there were places where, if he had done the same works that he did in Judea, the inhabitants would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. These places therefore must have been denied the means which it was known would have brought them to happiness.—There are degrees of advantages which, if men resist or misimprove, the Deity does not see fit to grant them more, whatever he may know would be the consequence. But by what reasons or rules particularly his providence is guided in this instance we cannot say.

original constitution was so established by him as to admit of vice and sufferings in the present state, and that therefore it cannot be a part of his scheme of Providence entirely to exclude them. We see that there are numberless persons to whom he does not give all the advantages for virtue and happiness which they might enjoy, and which, in all probability, would be effectual. It is sufficient to know that he gives more than enough to all, and does every thing that it is wisest and best for him to do, in order to bring about universal and infinite happiness.—But this subject will be more particularly considered hereafter, when I come to examine the objections against providence, taken from the evil, natural and moral, in the world.

Many of those who think, that there are no constant influences of the Deity in directing events, are ready to acknowledge, and every one who believes that Christianity was proved by miracles and

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came

came from God, must acknowledge, that there are particular emergencies in which he does interpose in the affairs of the world. Now, this concession is sufficient to establish what I am pleading for. For let it but be allowed that the Deity has ever once interposed since the original establishment of things, and there will remain no tolerable reason for imagining that he does not interpose continually, as far as there is any occasion.

It will, I think, be frivolous to assert, that this account of Providence makes it a continual series of *miracles*. If all exertions of Divine Power are to be considered as *miraculous*, this will indeed be true; nor will there be the least reason why it should not be admitted.—That influence of superior power which is implied in a miracle may, for aught we know, be exerted on numberless occasions; and what distinguishes it from common events may be only that, in the case of a miracle, the influence of superior

power is rendered obvious and sensible, by the extraordinary circumstances attending a particular fact. Thus; the removal of a disease in the common course of things no person can look upon as miraculous, whatever he may believe concerning the constant agency of the Deity in the creation. But if a disease is removed instantaneously at the command of a man, or in any other manner which cannot be accounted for by the ordinary powers of nature; in this case, the interposition of superior power becomes *visible*, and a proper miracle happens.

But what effectually removes every objection of this kind, and almost decides the question I am considering, is a point which has been already at large insisted upon; namely, “That the cause from which the general laws * that govern the

* It is to be wished, that all who think on the subject of this section, would consider what they mean by the word *Laws*. It is very ambiguous and indeter-

“ the material world are derived, is the
 “ immediate power of the Deity exerted
 “ every where.” It has, I hope, been
 shew in the last section, that we have
 clear and strong evidence for this.—To
 what was there said, I will beg leave to
 add, on the present occasion, that it is
 from this cause also, in particular, must
 be derived that constant succession of
 vegetables and animals which is kept up
 in the world. There is not one fact in
 nature which can be completely accounted
 for by the mere powers of mechanism.
 Most certainly then this fact cannot be
 thus accounted for. It is utterly incon-
 ceivable,

indeterminate in its signification, and has been often
 strangely misapplied and abused. The present question
 furnishes us with a strong proof of this. The general
 laws of nature signify nothing but particular *phænomena*
 which are observed in nature, or particular modes of
 the operation of some cause. When, therefore, the
 regulation of events, the continuance of the order of
 the world, or the formation of vegetables and animals
 is ascribed to *Laws* established at the creation, either
 the word *Laws* has no sense at all, like the word *Nature*
 when used in the same manner, or it must signify the
 regular and constant agency of the Creator.

ceivable, that works of such stupendous art as the bodies of vegetables and animals, myriads of which are continually formed about us, should be derived from laws planted at the creation in dead matter, which have ever since executed themselves. Those who say this, say they know not what. They make unmeaning words stand for causes, and attribute to matter infinitely more than it is capable of. Every new vegetable or animal, therefore, I consider as a new production of Divine Power, acting constantly and regularly according to an order or scheme at first fixed by his wisdom. But there is particular reason to think thus with respect to the conscious and living principles of animals. It is just as possible that these should arise into existence, in consequence of laws established at the creation without any *immediate* exertion of Divine Power, as it is that they should arise into existence of themselves without any cause at all*.——On this account,
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* I am sensible that there is room here for recurring to the notion of an original simultaneous production

the *preservation* of all things appears to be indeed but very little different from
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production of all things; and that some will not hesitate to assert, particularly, concerning the living principles in men and brutes, that they have existed from the first formation of this earth, and have ever since either lain dormant till united to bodies, or been transmigrating from one animal to another. I will not lose time in pointing out the absurdity and extravagance of this notion. How poor are the prejudices which lead persons to seek such expedients for maintaining the inactivity of the Deity? What is it that renders it so necessary to confine the exertion of creative power to the first formation of a system, rather than to consider it as going on to exert itself, according to a fixed order, during the continuance of a system?—Let this however be allowed. Still, since such an original simultaneous creation as I have mentioned must be supposed for every particular system; and since, most probably, there are new systems continually brought into being in the boundless universe; it will, even in this way, be necessary to admit the constant exertion of Divine power; nor is it possible to avoid this conclusion, without extending the notion now mentioned to the whole of nature, and asserting that there never has been more than one act of Divine Power, and that all the successions of Beings and worlds since the commencement of created existence, with all their
different

a *continual creation*; for was creative power to cease operating, the consequence would be, that no more new beings would make their appearance in the world, and that this earth would soon become a wild and horrid desert.

The conclusion arising from these observations is very obvious. Divine Power, we see, did not cease operating at the creation. It appears, on the contrary, that there is a constant exertion of it through all nature. Can there be any reason for denying that by it Providence is administered? Though employed continually in the preservation of the general laws of the material world, and the production of animate and inanimate Beings, must it be supposed to have nothing

different laws, have taken place of themselves, and will for ever continue to do so, in virtue of that one act, without requiring any immediate direction from the Creator, or any interposition of his power. If there is any person who is inclined to adopt this opinion, I have nothing to say to him.

thing to do with the affairs of moral agents?

I cannot think of more than one difficulty that can here offer itself to any person's thoughts. It is possible, that some who admit those general influences of Divine Power by which the world is preserved, may yet imagine that there is an incredibility in that kind of influence which the interpositions of Providence imply, because, being accommodated to particular cases and occasions, it must be a particular and occasional influence introduced out of course, and not reducible to any stated and uniform mode of operation. It cannot perhaps be necessary to take much notice of this objection.———Since *general* influences are only a number of *particular* ones, the distinction upon which it is founded cannot be of much weight. And, supposing it of weight, it must be in a great measure invalidated by some of the facts I have mentioned; for among these are instances,

instances, not only of general and stated exertions of Divine Power in the world, but of such as must be meant by particular and occasional ones.—However, were it at all necessary, it might very well be granted, without any prejudice to the present argument, that the Deity always acts by *general* influence, and in a stated course. It is easy to conceive, that the agency by which a particular providence is carried on, may be an agency by laws operating, in given circumstances, invariably and regularly; for no one can say, what laws and regulations may be established in the universe, by which events may be secretly directed. Dr. *Butler* * observes, that so particular an interposal

* “ Thus, that miraculous powers should be
 “ exerted at such times, upon such occasions, in
 “ such degrees and manners, and with regard to
 “ such persons rather than others; that the affairs
 “ of the world, being permitted to go on in their
 “ natural course so far, should, just at such a point,
 “ have a new direction given them by miraculous
 “ interpositions; that these interpositions should be
 “ exactly

interposals of the Deity as that in the Christian revelation, might have been by general laws. It is at least certain, that there is one law to which the whole of divine influence in nature, of whatever kind it is, may be reduced. I mean the supreme law of *rectitude*. When viewed in their reference to this, all the diversities of operation by which the administration of the world may be conducted, agree, and appear to be only different effects of one and the same principle acting variously, according to the different circumstances and characters of moral agents.——If any person should still want satisfaction about the present point, let

“ exactly in such degrees and respects only; all this
“ may have been by general laws: Unknown indeed to us: But no more unknown than the laws
“ from whence it is that some die as soon as they
“ are born, and others live to extreme old age;
“ that one man is so superior to another in understanding; with innumerable more things, which
“ we cannot reduce to any laws or rules at all, tho’
“ it is taken for granted they are as much reduceable
“ to general ones, as gravitation.” *Analogy*, Part II.
Chap. 4.

let him recollect an observation which has been made at the beginning of this section. Let him consider that there is no more reason for being prejudiced against the influence of *invisible* agents, and especially the supreme, over events, while a course of nature is going on, than there is for being prejudiced, on the same account, against the influence which *visible* agents have over the affairs of their own species, and those of the Beings below them. The latter we know to be, not only consistent with the course of nature, but a part of it; and the other may be equally so. This is so true that, agreeably to Dr. Butler's observation, even the interposition of superior power implied in a miracle, however unusual or extraordinary, may be entirely natural: That is; the constitution of the world may be such as allows of it in certain cases.—I know it is common to think, that miracles imply a *suspension* or *violation* of the laws of nature. But no opinion can be more groundless. Were we
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to see the motion of water downwards cease at once at the word of a man, or a river parted in its course, as *Jordan* was, we should see a miracle. But we could not say that the law of gravitation was suspended; for the water might have gravitated as usual, and the true cause of the event be, the exertion of an adequate superior power to controul the effects of gravitation, in which its suspension is no more implied than in a man's preventing a heavy body from falling, by applying his hand to it. Nor could we in this instance say, that the event was not agreeable to the constitution of the universe; for in order to this we should be able to discover what the constitution of the universe is, taking in the visible and invisible world, and that it excludes *all* interpositions of *superior* power in human affairs——Every one will easily see how these observations are to be applied to the purpose for which they are mentioned.——Dismissing them, therefore, I shall beg leave to introduce here one fur-

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ther observation which seems worth notice.

It ought to be considered that events happen in the world in such a manner, as plainly render it not unlikely, that there may be some superior influence concerned in directing them. We are far from having a perfect knowledge of all the causes from whence events arise, and therefore cannot say how far the Divine hand may be among those causes. The uncertainty which attends all human schemes is continually observed and felt, and has given rise to the common notions of *Fortune*, by which many of the antient philosophers seem to have meant the same with *Providence*. The best laid schemes often fail of success strangely, and some of the most important changes are often derived from incidents in themselves the most trifling, so that, indeed, it is not possible for us to imagine what would follow from an alteration of any one circumstance in the general series of
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of events. What room then is there for the influence of invifible agency? What a command over events would a fuperior Being have, by only a fecret direction of what appears to us moft accidental and trifling?

Such are the moft material obfervations which have occurred to me, on the manner in which Providence is adminiftered. ———The great enquiry on this fubject is, how far it is reasonable to admit the conftant exertion of Divine influence for this purpofe. In anfwer to this enquiry, I have endeavoured to represent the folly of thofe prejudices which difpofe men to exclude from the world the influence of the Deity, and to confider him as being what no other agent is; only a mere fpectator of the laws and order of the world. But more than this has been done. It has, I think, been demonftrated that the laws and order of the world are nothing but his uniform agency; and that the notion of a felf-fubfifting

world, or of a scheme established at the creation which has been ever since executing itself without depending on the Creator, implies an absolute impossibility. —There is, therefore, a necessity of acknowledging the constant exertion of Divine influence in nature. This leads us almost unavoidably to conceive of Providence as administered by it. And, in answer to a difficulty which might possibly remain with some, it has been observed, that it is neither necessary to consider the influence of Providence as an adventitious influence out of the course of nature, nor if it was, could any reason be drawn from hence for rejecting it.

The question I have been discussing is, I think, the only question on the mode of the administration of Providence, about which there can be much dispute. It is necessary this should be observed, because some probably will be inclined
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to think, that there is another question of which notice should have been taken; namely, the question how far Providence is carried on by the instrumentality of subordinate agents. But it will easily appear, that the discussion of this question cannot lead us into any sentiments on the points I have been considering, different from those already explained. 'Tis with me out of doubt, that there is an instrumentality of subordinate agents in carrying on the designs of Providence, and it may not perhaps be possible to conceive how far it reaches; but then, I consider these agents as acting in every instance under the superintendency of the Deity, which reduces their instrumentality into a perfect coincidence with that mode of administering Providence, for which I have pleaded.——If any one will deny this, and assert that there is no other direction of affairs than is produced by created Beings, uninfluenced by the Deity, and acting without com-

mission from him; in this case, there will plainly be no other Providence than that of these Beings, and all things will be left to the effects of an original establishment, without any subsequent care or government. Several remarks have been already made on this opinion, and there will be occasion to say somewhat more about it in the next section. I am in hopes, however, that but little need be said to convince most considerate persons, that the moral world is not thus left to itself, or that the several orders of reasonable Beings in it are not delivered up in such a manner to their influence on one another, as that there is no *supreme direction* from the Deity. Were there no such decisive arguments to be urged as some that have been proposed, we might well reckon, with confidence that the Being who is most nearly *related* and most intimately *present* to the world, is also the Being who has the most constant and active concern with it.

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But not to repeat what has been before said, I shall now proceed to some further points, which it will be proper to consider on the subject of Providence.

S E C T. IV.

Of the Objections against Providence.

A Good deal has been said in answer to several of the objections which have been made against the doctrine of Providence. But there are some important ones of which no notice has been taken, and my design in this section is to offer a few observations upon them.

It would preclude much that has been objected on this subject to remember, that the directions of Providence are, as it is certainly best they should be, concealed and invisible; and that, therefore, we cannot in particular cases determine in what manner its influence has been exerted, or what its intentions are. My meaning here will be best explained by
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considering a few instances.——A fleet, suppose, has beat an enemy's fleet in consequence of a sudden turn of the wind in its favour.——Here would be an event which, we might assuredly believe, did not happen without the concern and direction of the Deity, and which might reasonably be ascribed to him as the first cause and supreme disposer of all things. But it would be presumptuous to say, that it proved his approbation of the victors and their cause, or that the sudden turn of the wind was produced by his *immediate* hand.——Again; an earthquake, let us suppose, has laid in ruins a city or a kingdom. That person would, in my opinion, be inexcusable, who should, in this case, terminate his views in the natural causes which produced the earthquake. The establishing these causes at first in the frame of nature, and conducting things since in such a manner as that it should happen just *when* and *where* it did, ought in all reason to be ascribed to the Divine
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good pleasure. And were not this the case, or were it true that it never was any object of Divine foresight and counsel, but derived entirely from blind chance or fate, all religious views of it would be irrational and absurd. The particular intentions, however, of Providence in such a calamity, or the reasons by which its disposals with respect to it have been guided, we are not capable of discovering; and many persons have been much too free in their judgments on such occasions, and, in consequence of this, have done much towards bringing this doctrine into discredit.—We may perceive indeed some general ends which are answered by all events of this kind, such as to alarm and awaken men, and bring them to a sense of virtue and piety: But we cannot go much further; or say, for example, that the calamity was designed as a judgment on the sufferers, and indicated them to be worse than other men.

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Once more. A good man, let us suppose, with seriousness and simplicity, makes it the constant subject of his prayers to the Deity that he would shew him what is true and right, deliver his mind from the influence of unreasonable prejudices, and direct his thoughts and enquiries. Such a person may, I think, be assured in general, that his prayers are graciously regarded, and that he is, in some way or other, the better for them. And he may also even believe that his sentiments, in consequence of them, are nearer to truth than they would otherwise have been. But wherein, particularly, they are so; or how far, in consequence of his prayers, he has, on any one point, been guarded from error, it is not possible for him to know. As the Deity has thought fit to make us short-sighted and fallible, we must be ignorant to what degree he may suffer us to mistake. Our chief security and comfort on this head are, that, with honest hearts, we cannot mistake dangerously, or fall into any errors
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that shall be imputed to us as crimes, and lessen the Divine favour to us.

What has been now said concerning the influences of Divine Providence is very necessary to be attended to, in order to prevent the danger of superstition and enthusiasm.—That there is a wise Providence extending to all events, we have, it has been shewn; sufficient evidence to prove: And that its influence is not discernible by us, or distinguishable, in its exertions, from the common operations of natural causes, and the course of our own thoughts, is no more any reason for denying its reality, than it is for denying the reality of our souls, or of the ubiquity of the Divine essence, that they are not the immediate objects of sensible observation.——In some instances indeed, the interpositions of the Deity have been open and sensible, but such interpositions are very extraordinary; and to expect them in any common cases would be madness. The delusions of
enthusiasm

enthusiasm take their rise from hence, and consist chiefly in ascribing particular feelings, without reason, to supernatural suggestion; or in imagining that the directions of God's Providence, and his influence on the soul, are capable of being particularly observed.

'Tis proper that it should be further observed here, with respect to the doctrine of Providence, that it ought never to be explained in such a manner as to destroy the value of the agency of created beings. This would be the case were such a dependence of events on the Deity maintained, as would imply that they are not all dependent on the wills of inferior Beings. No one, I hope, who has attended to the account I have given of Providence, can think that any such consequence arises from it. I have shewn, particularly, how consistent this doctrine is with the liberty of mankind; and what has been said to this purpose, together with the observations that have been

been made on the manner of administering Providence, is sufficient to remove any objections that can be taken from the necessity of allowing Beings, when created, scope for action, and leaving events, in some measure, to be determined by their choice. This, undoubtedly, is necessary. Were there no scope for action given Beings, or had they no power over what comes to pass, there could be no such thing as a moral government in nature, there would be no room for *real* beneficence and the happiness connected with it, and the whole rational universe would be a system of conscious machinery, void of value and dignity. But then, surely, this does not oblige us to maintain that the Deity exercises no Providence over the Affairs of rational Beings. The power which they have over events, with all its restrictions, was given by him; and all the particular exertions of it are under his direction. If any of them become depraved, and bring calamities upon themselves

themselves or others, we must say, that so the Deity suffers things to happen. Those circumstances in the plan of nature and states of Beings which gave occasion to, or admitted of, such evils, we must ascribe to his will; and all that happens in consequence of them we ought to consider as superintended by him in the best manner. Nothing would be more unreasonable than to imagine, that there is any inconsistency between a *limited* and *derived dependence* of events on created agents, and a *supreme dependence* of all events on that first cause, *of whom and through whom, are all things.*

—— My happiness, let me suppose, depends entirely, in a particular instance, on the determination of one of my fellow-creatures. It will in this case be strictly true, that it is the Deity puts me into his hands. If, contrary to reason and the Divine law, he abuses his power, it will be my duty to acquiesce chearfully, from a conviction of the right which the Deity has to make my happiness depend

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on whatever conditions he pleases, and of the unerring reason by which all his dispensations are guided. Not to be an absolute sufferer by existence, if innocent, is the chief unalienable right I have. Within this limit the Deity may, in any degree he sees best, and that is consistent with the rules of distributive justice, make my state precarious and dependent. I can never suffer beyond what is fit; and I may, from his goodness, expect all such remedies for the sufferings which may be brought upon me as are, on the whole, proper to be provided. Rectitude, under the government of a being of perfect rectitude, I may be sure, shall take place invariably, universally and for ever; and this is all I ought to wish for.—In a word; the Divine scheme is, plainly, that events shall, to a certain degree, be what created agents make them. His will, in numberless cases, appears to be, that one Being shall or shall not receive particular benefits, or suffer particular evils as his fellow Beings shall please

please to determine. But then, this happens no farther than he knows to be best, and in no instances but such as he appoints. Every determination of every Being which would produce any degree of *wrong* suffering, or any event not consistent with a perfect order of administration, he will undoubtedly either prevent, or over-rule in its consequences. He is present in all minds; and that whole concatenation of events and causes, in consequence of which any agent finds himself at any time in any circumstances, should be considered as derived from him, and as having been, in every part of it, the object of his superintending care. It would, as I before observed, be denying the doctrine of Providence entirely, and making the universe in a manner forlorn and fatherless, to suppose, that all that the Deity does is to endow Beings with powers and affections, and then to turn them out into a wide theatre, there to scuffle as they can, and do what they please, without

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taking any care of them, or presiding over their affairs. We cannot be more sure of the moral perfections of the Deity than we are that this is false. Whatever evils there are in the world, they can be only such as he is pleased to admit into it. When he willed the existence of the present universe, he willed it as including every event which he foresaw would arise in it. All abuse of liberty and reason he does indeed disapprove and forbid, and will adequately punish. It is of essential malignity, and as far as it enters tends to lay waste his works. But it can enter no further than he sees fit to suffer it. He had the best reasons, for establishing at first those states and connexions of Beings, from whence he knew it would spring. He can restrain and direct it as he pleases, and even turn it into an occasion of good. If other systems in which it does not take place contain more happiness, and are equally possible and proper, they might, when this was produced, have been previously existent
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in the greatest variety any one can imagine, and the addition of this might have been a further proper exertion of infinite goodness. It would be impossible for the Deity ever to act, if it is a just reason against the production of any given system, that there are others possible including greater happiness.

But these are observations which I shall have occasion to insist on, and to explain particularly hereafter, and which lead me to what I chiefly intended in this section; namely, to consider the objections against Providence taken from the irregularities and evils natural and moral, which we see in the world. These are the greatest of all the difficulties that occur to us in thinking of this subject. My design however is not to enter into a detail of all that may be offered to remove them, but only to suggest a few sentiments with this view, which seem to me of peculiar importance, and some of which, per-

haps, have not been enough insisted on by others.

The most common answer to all the difficulties arising from the seeming irregularities and disorders in the system of nature, is taken from our ignorance and narrow views, compared with the extent of the scheme of Providence.—

This answer is solid and important, but it requires to be stated with some care, in order to appear in its just and full force. It may be said in opposition to it, “ that we can have no more reason to “ conclude, on account of unknown relations and connexions, that the *seeming* disorders are not *really* such, than “ we have, on the other hand, to conclude on the like account, that the “ seeming order is not really such ; and “ that, therefore, the same regard is due “ in all cases to *irregular* appearances as “ to *regular* ; that both should be allowed their whole weight undiminished “ by any considerations of our ignorance,

“ and

“ and our sentiments be determined by
 “ the *degree* in which we see, or think
 “ we see, the one to prevail over the
 “ other.”——But a little attention will
 discover this way of arguing, in the present
 case, to be very fallacious. The position
 on which it is founded, “ that unknown
 “ relations may as well shew seeming
 “ order to be disorder as the contrary,” is
 undoubtedly false. Order and regularity,
 we are sure, wherever they are found,
 cannot but proceed from design and
 wisdom; and it is not possible that any
 unknown relations should destroy the
 appearance of them.—Thus; if we saw a
 million of things, disposed regularly at the
 angles of a polygon of a million of equal
 sides, we should necessarily conclude that
 there was real order here, derived from
 knowledge and wisdom; nor could we
 help reckoning it impertinent to object,
 that, if we knew all the relations of these
 things to others, we might perceive the
 contrary. But, on the other hand; sup-
 posing any number of objects to be dis-

posed *apparently* according to no order, we could not from hence conclude that this was *really* the case ; because it is not impossible but that their relations and correspondencies to surrounding objects, did we perceive them, might shew us that they were disposed in the most beautiful order.—In like manner, it would be very absurd to say, that had we larger views we might discover, perhaps, that the eye was not made for seeing, or that the bodies of plants and animals are not the effects of art. But, it is by no means so to say of any appointments of nature, or parts of an animal body which *seem* irregular or useless, that, had we larger views, we might perceive them to be otherwise.—It is, therefore, evident that the *relations* of objects, or their *connexions* with other objects, may entirely alter what appears irregular in them, at the same time that they cannot affect what appears regular ; and that, consequently, contrary to what has been objected, there is the greatest regard due to
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our ignorance when we contemplate the former, but none when we contemplate the latter. The one *must* be the effect of wisdom, and the other *may*. From the appearance of deformity, or ill contrivance in an object, when seen in one position, or considered by itself, there may not arise the least presumption, that it will have the same appearance when seen in another position, or when considered as a part of an extensive and complicated system. How foolish may the measures taken by the rulers of a state, or the institutions of a civil polity, though in reality the wisest possible, seem to a person not enough acquainted with the situation of the state, or with the whole plan of the civil polity? How dull may a single part of a musical composition appear when heard alone, which yet, when heard in concert with the other parts, may make the most delightful harmony? How awkward may a beautiful and necessary member of a machine appear, when detached from the

rest, or when viewed by one who sees not its *reference* to the end of the machine? How confused does the system of the world appear to a spectator on the earth, or according to the *Ptolemaick* system; but how regular and harmonious is it according to the true system, or as it would appear to a spectator in the sun? Can it be excusable not to bear in mind such truths, when we contemplate Divine Providence? Or is it at all judging according to reason, not to make the allowances they require? Is there any one who, in examining any work of human art, would not impute to his ignorance whatever in it appeared not consistent with the skill which the general frame of it discovered? Why is not this equally reasonable with respect to the constitution of nature, where we find innumerable proofs of infinite wisdom, and in the meanest productions of which is exhibited an incomprehensible exactness of art and workmanship?

It

It may be worth adding here, that, being ourselves part of nature, and deriving from the same original with it our very notions of order, it seems very incredible that we should be able to correct nature, or to conceive an order greater and better than is to be found in it *.

There are two accounts to be given of the appearance of irregularities in nature. It may be occasioned either by the reality of these irregularities; or by our ignorance, confined views, and disadvantageous situation for observing nature. It may be owing either to a *real want* of wisdom, or to the *infinity* and *unfathomableness* of it. The first of these accounts contradicts numberless *Phænomena* of nature; is inconsistent with the perfection of wisdom apparent in the general frame of the world, and opposes our most reasonable apprehensions concerning the nature

* See Characteristics, Vol. II. p. 284.

ΤΙς γὰρ ἀν εἰη φύσις τὰςδε (περικαλλεστάτῃ κόσμῳ) κρείττων, ἢ γὰρ ἀν εἰποι τις, μέρος αὐτῆς ἐστὶ. Arist. de Mundo, Cap. V.

ture and attributes of the first cause. The latter account, on the contrary, is in the highest degree easy, natural, and obvious. 'Tis suggested to us by what we have experienced in similar instances, and agreeable to what, from the reason of the thing, we might have foreseen must have happened to such creatures as we are, in considering such a scheme as that of nature.— Can we then doubt a moment to which of these accounts we shall give the preference? Is it reasonable to suffer our conviction of a fact, for which we have good evidence, to be influenced by appearances that may as well be consistent as inconsistent with it; nay, by appearances that, on the supposition of its truth, we must beforehand have expected? Must it not be always proper to suspect our judgments in cases where we have often been mistaken, and where it is certain we must be particularly liable to mistake?

Let us here fix our thoughts again* on the structure of the human body. We
know

* See page 57.

know it to be an effect of consummate skill. But there are some of its parts the uses and propriety of which we do not perceive. Can we suppose these parts to be really useless, and the human body, in such instances, to be ill made? Or can it be possible for any person, in this case, to infer any more than the “imperfection of this knowledge?”—There is the very same reason against drawing any other conclusion from what is dark to us in the dispensations of Providence, and the government of events. —What, in truth, would be most of all unaccountable is, that to Beings whose views are confined within the narrowest limits of time and place, many parts of an infinite plan, contrived by infinite wisdom, should not appear unaccountable. It ought to satisfy us, that we see and know enough to convince us of the perfection of the Divine ways and works. To expect that they should be fully understood by us, or that no difficulties should embarrass us in our enquiries into them,

them, would shew the most inexcusable folly. It has happened, in many instances, that what for some time had been looked upon as faulty in the constitution of nature has been found to be wise and good. This ought to teach us diffidence with regard to whatever we may still be unable to account for. All the fancies of men, that they could mend God's works, or correct the order of the world, have hitherto proved nothing but their ignorance and presumption. As new light has been struck out, objections have vanished, and the Divine works have shone with greater brightness. The further advances have been made in the knowledge of nature, and the more open it has been laid to our view, the more glorious it has appeared, and the stronger proofs have been discovered of the perfections of its author: And hence, what we ought in all reason to reckon upon is, that were we acquainted with the whole of nature, or had faculties for entering into the counsels of Providence, and discovering the connexions and dependencies of
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of all its parts, *every* irregularity would disappear, and all that now puzzles us be found completely right and good. ——— The chief difficulties occur just where we might expect them; in the state of human affairs, and the management of the *moral* world. The scheme of the *natural* world lies more in one view before us, and has less dependence on past and future events; but that of the other, 'tis reasonable to think, must be as much more deep laid as it is of greater importance. It must be of inconceivable extent as to *duration* as well as *place*, consist of many *related periods*, and proceed through a long succession of *ages*. If then of the former we are incompetent judges, how much more so must we be of the latter; and with what patience and hope ought we, under a sense of our blindness, to wait till time shall unravel the scheme, and shew us more clearly the perfect order of the Divine government?——In short; that person is indeed hardly worthy of a place among God's works, who observes them
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so carelessly as not to know, that there is a depth of wisdom and contrivance in them which he cannot trace, and is not led from hence to implicit and hearty acquiescence, *believing* where he does not *see*, and adoring where he finds himself incapable of comprehending.

The next observation I shall make on the objections I have mentioned is, that in general, they are founded too much on the unreasonable and absurd expectation “ that the Deity should act, in *every* “ *single instance*, to the utmost extent of “ his power, and communicate the greatest possible happiness.”——Happiness, we know, is greatly prevalent in all we see of the world. Every district of it abounds with effects of the goodness of its maker. Our complaint then must be, not why is not goodness displayed in the constitution of nature, but why is not *more* goodness displayed. But let it be well considered, that this is a complaint, the foundation of which it is not possible to remove: For, had the
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happiness communicated been ever so *great*, we might still have asked, why is it not *greater*?

As long as the sum of the happiness of any Being exceeds that of his miseries, God is kind to him; nor does it make the least difference to a Being, whether any particular quantity of happiness with which he is blessed is pure and unmixed, or only the clear excess of his enjoyments above his sufferings, or whether larger capacities of enjoyment are given him with proportionable deductions of sufferings, or narrower capacities without any such deductions.

As far, therefore, as the attribute of *goodness* is concerned, no objections can be made against any natural evils overbalanced by good, which may not equally be made against communicating a smaller, rather than a larger quantity of good, or granting narrower rather than greater capacities of happiness. ——— Thus, if the animals on this globe (supposing all
along

along happiness to *prevail* in their existence) should, be exempted from the greater calamities that befall them, they should, for the same reason, be exempted from the smaller, and enjoy an uniform happiness, without being, at any time, in the least annoyed or disturbed. This happiness also they may expect to be the greatest their natures are capable of, and to continue for ever. They ought, therefore, to be immortal, subject to no decay, liable to no accidents, and secure of enjoying every pleasure in the highest possible degree. But we cannot stop here. For the same reason that they ought to be thus happy to the utmost extent of their capacities, they ought to have had higher capacities. But how extravagant is all this? At this rate, no finite or imperfect Being must ever be created.

'Tis a very different question, how far the *wisdom* of God appears in the mixed state appointed to Beings: And so likewise

wife is the question, how far his *justice* can be vindicated in the relative states of mankind, considered as reasonable agents of different moral characters.—The chief difficulties attending the latter enquiry are removed by supposing a future state; and with respect to the former, we know enough to be satisfied, that all the particular evils incident to Beings are under good direction, and that it is for the best reasons that a mixed state is appointed them. It deserves particular notice, that many of the pains and evils to which all animals are liable, appear plainly to be designed as means to secure their happiness and to guard them against harm, and are therefore, as much almost as any of their natural pleasures and enjoyments, proofs both of the wisdom and goodness of the Deity.

I have called the expectation that God, *in any single instance*, should produce the greatest possible happiness unreasonable and absurd. This is an extremely evi-

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dent truth. But it should be observed, that it by no means follows from hence that, taking in the whole extent and duration of the creation, a quantity of absolute good has not been produced which exceeds all that is possible to be conceived. Though only a limited quantity of happiness can exist in any given number of limited effects, and though, therefore, all that we can reasonably expect with regard to any single parts of nature is, to see that good is prevalent, or that happiness is designed and communicated; and to expect more would run us into the greatest absurdities, yet the entire plan of created existence, reaching, perhaps from eternity to eternity, and extending through immensity, may include in it *infinite*, or *infinitely infinite* happiness.

But to dismiss this. It will be worth while here, to apply the present argument more particularly to the state and circumstances of man. ——— Various have
been

been the complaints of the evils under which man groans, and the calamities to which he is liable. But if it must be granted, that he enjoys, on the whole, more pleasure than he suffers pain; that his life and state are in a high degree eligible, notwithstanding the evils blended with them; and that the whole order of his nature, as it came from the hands of the Creator, is such as proves him to have been designed for nothing but virtue and happiness: If, I say, this must be granted, as surely it must, it should go a great way towards silencing all objections and complaints. For it will follow that the meaning of them must be in a great measure this; “Why was
 “not man made *more* happy and per-
 “fect?” A question which, agreeably to what was before observed, might have been asked, though he had been placed ever so much higher in the scale of Being.
 ——Let then every objection of this kind be for ever exploded. Man, it is true, is a very frail, imperfect, and short-lived

creature; but still his existence is better to him than non-existence. Such a race is, at least, *some* addition to the universal happiness; and, therefore, it was an instance of divine goodness to produce it; and instead of murmuring, it becomes us rather to praise and adore.

But it will, probably, be thought, that no observations of this kind affect the main difficulty that occurs to us in considering Providence, which arises, “not
“ from the *natural* evils and imperfections
“ of man, but from what religion teaches
“ us concerning his circumstances as a
“ *moral* agent, placed in a state where he
“ is strongly tempted to wickedness, and
“ where it must have been expected that
“ a general corruption would prevail, *all*
“ forfeit innocence, and *great numbers* fall
“ into the future punishment of sin, and
“ be *lost for ever*.” ——— This is indeed an important difficulty; nor would I at all pretend to be able to give any adequate solution of it. Some observations,
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However, there are, suggested by the present argument, which seem to lessen its weight, and which, therefore, it will not be amiss to propose.

Man seems to be in the lowest order of reasonable Beings, and from what has been said, it appears that there are no objections against creating the lowest order, which would not equally hold against creating any other order. Now, it is reasonable to think, that intelligent agents, in the first period of their existence, or antecedently to all security from experience and instruction, must be more liable to deviate than in any subsequent period; and it is certain, that those in a lower order must be more frail and defectible than those in a higher. What wonder then is it if of those in the *lowest* order, and who consequently must be in the *greatest* danger of deviation, many should actually deviate, abuse their liberty, and lose the happiness they might have secured?——It is

absurd to ask why was liberty granted them, since it is essential to intelligence, and to all rational and moral happiness. Liberty then they must have, or not exist at all, and the consequence of liberty, when exposed to temptations and trials, must sometimes be depravity and wickedness. And why should not a liberty so circumstanced be communicated, as well as a liberty more favourably circumstanced*? Can it be asserted that all Beings have a right not to be placed in any disadvantageous states? Or, should this be allowed, will it be asserted further, that they ought not even to be exposed to the possibility of being ever brought into such states? As the Deity might not have given existence at all, he
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* It should be observed, that I suppose that *all* Beings might have been placed in such circumstances as that *none* of them, though possessed of perfect natural liberty, should ever be in *danger* of any deviations or calamities: And the design of what is here said, and of a good deal that follows, is to shew that we have no sufficient reason to expect this; and also that, allowing it possible, it was not *best*.

may surely give it on any terms which are consistent with its being in any degree a benefit, or not worse than non-existence. He cannot, therefore, be under an obligation to give it free from dangers and inconveniencies. — Antecedently to the creation of man, as many of the more perfect orders of creatures might have existed as can possibly be imagined, and the creation of man might make a further addition to the universal happiness. Why then should he not be created? — Is it not most reasonable to expect that Divine goodness should display itself in producing an endless variety of effects, and in giving existence to every different order of creatures* capable of being happy?

These

* What is here suggested shews, that the creation of a variety of orders of creatures is not only consistent with goodness, but required by it. — But there is another observation which shews this in a different manner, and which, though particular use will be made of it again, it will not be amiss just to mention on this occasion. Had there been no ine-

These observations are sufficient to prove, that the perfections of the Deity
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qualities among Beings, there could have been no room for beneficence; no possibility of gratifying the desire of doing good; no opportunities for exercising virtue in one of its highest instances, and that principle in rational Being, which affords a happiness the most worthy of a rational nature, must have lain for ever dormant and useless. See *Mr. Abernethy's Sermons*, Vol. II. Sermon III. See likewise the ingenious and worthy Mr. Amory's twenty-two sermons, Sermon XII. from p. 344, to p. 348.

I cannot forbear adding in this place, that it seems to me very improper to say, as some have done, that God chose this system, in which evil takes place, as the best of all possible systems. It is difficult to say what can be meant by the best of all possible systems. If it signifies that which includes the *greatest* sum of happiness, it is as inconceivable as the *longest* of all durations, or the *largest* of all numbers. Those persons must have low ideas of God's works who can look upon this earth, with its connexions, or even the whole visible universe of sun, planets, and fixed stars, as at all considerable, when compared with the rest of the creation. At the time, therefore, this system was produced, there might have been numberless other systems, containing brighter displays of infinite power and goodness, not only *possible* but *actually existent*. All that we can reasonably expect to see in what falls under *our* notice of the works and
ways

by no means required that such a race as ours should not exist. When considered by itself we see enough, notwithstanding the difficulties that we meet with, to convince us that it is the effect of wisdom and goodness: and when considered in its relation to the whole system of Beings, we know not how important purposes it may serve.

It is particularly necessary on this argument to bear in mind, that *sufficient* advantages are supposed to be granted to all, and that nothing is expected from any Being which is not equitably proportioned to the light and opportunities he enjoys.—If some have fewer advantages than others, all have more than they can claim; and from all as much less will be required, as they have had less given them. If some have a smaller

ways of God is, that they are entirely right and good, and worthy of his perfections. To desire more, or to expect that this system should be the best, the fairest, and happiest possible, is the same as to expect that there should be no subordination or variety in the Divine works,

smaller chance for happiness than others, all have *some* chance, and every one might have had none at all, that is, might never have existed. Happiness is always a free gift from God, and he may make Beings liable to come short of it, in any degree he sees best. Any *capacity*, any *possibility* of happiness is valuable for the same reason that happiness itself is so, and ought to be received with gratitude. Nay, such at present are our circumstances, that we have indeed reason for the utmost gratitude. We have before us the prospect of a *blessed immortality* which we cannot lose, but through our own fault.—Far then be it from us to accuse our Maker.—It is in your power to secure *infinite* happiness. All the means necessary for this are given you. Nothing but voluntary and inexcusable guilt can hurt you. Praise God, therefore. Improve carefully the advantages you are blest with; and be not so unreasonable as to complain because you are not saved the
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care and pains you must use in working out your salvation; for this is a complaint which nothing can satisfy, besides granting you every possible advantage, placing you above all labour and hazard, and making you absolutely indefectible.

The argument on which I here insist is, I think, sufficient to teach us a humble and thankful acquiescence in the condition allotted us. But it would scarcely be right to omit observing, that there is a great deal more to be said in the present case, and particularly in vindication of Providence, with respect to that state of labour and danger in which we are placed. I shall, therefore, beg leave to digress so far as to introduce a few observations on this subject, not immediately connected with the main argument which I am pursuing.

The fact that our state is a state of labour and danger is too obvious to be questioned. There is nothing in human
life

life stable and certain. There is nothing given us so freely that we are to use no pains to obtain or preserve it. Almost all the blessings of our Being are to be earned by diligence, if we would possess them. Such is the Divine establishment, that the lazy and indolent must be deficient and unhappy. But what deserves most of our notice, is that part of the precariousness of our state which is caused by its dependence on our fellow-beings. There is not, I think, any fact in the constitution of the world which is more remarkable than this ; or which, at first sight, seems to contradict more our ideas of Divine goodness. How common is it for one man to have at his command the fates of whole provinces and kingdoms ? Even our receiving existence, as well as our condition afterwards, is made to depend on the wills of our fellow-beings. In the beginning of life we are committed to the care of parents or guardians, who can, almost as they please, determine our state in future life, or cut
us

us off entirely from it. What is similar to this is true of our state as moral agents designed for existence hereafter. As an infant is put in the way to the happiness of the present life, so is a grown man put in the way to happiness in another world, and naturally capable of everlasting improvement in knowledge and perfection. And as, in our former capacity, it is put into the power of men to cause us to fail of the happiness we might have enjoyed in life ; so likewise, in our latter capacity, it is put into their power, by various means, to deprive us of future happiness, and to cause us to miscarry for ever.

What has been already said is of great use to silence the complaints which are apt to rise within us against this part of the constitution of nature, and can hardly be too much inculcated. We had no right to existence or happiness at all, and therefore the Deity may make them dependent and precarious in whatever manner

manner his counsels require. But we need not rest the defence of Providence on any argument of this kind. 'We are capable, I think, of perceiving very important reasons for such a constitution, and of discovering that it displays great wisdom and goodness.

It is absolutely necessary, as was observed page 94, that intelligent Beings should have scope given them for action. There is a plain congruity in making their happiness to arise from the proper exercise of their powers, and to be the result of their own endeavours. This is the only happiness that can suit the natures of active and free creatures. Had they no command over events; were blifs forced upon them, independently of their own choice and endeavours; or were their states so immutably fixed as not to be liable to be affected by one another, the consequence would be, that they would have nothing to do; that their faculties would be given them in

2 vain;

vain ; that virtue would be totally excluded from the creation, and an universal stagnation or quietism take place in it.

But I shall, on this occasion, desire particular attention to the following observations, which, I fancy, will strengthen some of those already made, and shew us plainly what unreasonable expectations we are apt to entertain from the goodness of God.

Had the natural course of things in the present state been such, that whenever any particular calamities or accidents happened to men, there should have been no remedies for them ; we could have had no just reason for complaint, and God would have been good. Nor could any arguments have been taken from this attribute to prove that there ought to have been remedies provided, which would not equally have proved that they ought to be easy, universal, and infallible,

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or rather that there should have been no occasion for them, and no sufferings or pains of any kind. But the fact is, that there are remedies provided for the misfortunes and calamities of men, and that thus greater goodness is in this instance displayed in the constitution of nature, than we could on any sure grounds have antecedently expected. Men are not left, as they might have been, to perish irretrievably by the calamities that happen to them, but it is put into their power in numberless cases to help one another, and to prevent the fatal effects that would follow particular calamities. A provision is made in the spontaneous agency and benevolence of our fellow-creatures, for a great addition to the happiness of life, and diminution of its sufferings. And this itself becomes a still higher display of goodness beyond which we cannot easily enlarge our ideas. For by establishing a plan wherein Beings are thus left to be the voluntary causes of one

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another's

another's happiness, room is given them for the exercise of beneficence, for gratifying the noblest affection in their natures, and enjoying the most Godlike bliss of which they are capable. Had nature been framed agreeably to what might have appeared, to our narrow views, best and most productive of happiness, there would probably have been no such liability to calamitous events, or dependence of Beings on one another, as we observe in it; and, consequently, the highest kind of happiness would have been wanting in it; and the very end we meant to secure would have been defeated.

What has been here said of the constitution of things in the present world, may, I suppose, be applicable in a great measure to the whole plan of Providence and system of being. The welfare of a *species*, like that of *individuals* among men, may be made dependent on a higher species, and whole orders of

K reasonable

reasonable creatures may be so circumstanced, as to be liable to be brought into very calamitous states, from which it may not be possible for them to be saved, according to the general laws of the world, except by the kind assistance and labours of Beings superior to them. And from what I have observed, we see reason to believe that such a general oeconomy of nature, though the result in some instances may prove abortion and ruin, was necessary to produce the greatest virtue, and the greatest good on the whole.—It is an enquiry of some importance here how far the dependence of Beings on one another may extend; or within what limits it can be consistent with rectitude, that they should be liable to suffer in consequence of one another's agency. I have already hinted some observations on this head in the preceding section. We may be assured, in general, that the connexions of Beings are under the best regulations, and their powers wisely limited: And we may also know, in particular,

particular, that their dependence on one another cannot extend so far as that there shall ever happen a failure of *adequate retribution*, or that any Beings shall be liable to be deprived of any of their *unalienable* rights, or to suffer any thing which it would be wrong or hard that, as the creatures of the Deity, they should suffer. The powers, therefore, of Beings over one another cannot extend further than to the *gifts of bounty*, or such blessings as the Deity is not *obliged* to grant. Of this kind are existence, its perpetuity, and almost all its privileges, capacities, and advantages: And therefore, it may be easily conceived what degradations and losses may be sometimes brought upon Beings under the Divine government, in consequence of their mutual agency, consistently with the most perfect justice, and even (if some of the preceding observations are right) as the effect of a constitution formed in the best manner to produce happiness.—But the question, how far the dependence of Beings on one

another may extend, would carry me beyond my present purpose were I to attempt a proper discussion of it, nor is there any occasion for now entering into it further.

It is right, I have said, that the happiness of intelligent Beings should be made to be the fruit of what they *do* and *deserve*. The noblest enjoyments, or all which pre-suppose moral merit, can have no other source; and virtue (since its nature will not admit of its being either created with Beings, or taught them) must always be an *acquisition*. These considerations, when applied to the subject into which I am enquiring, have a considerable tendency to render it less puzzling. It is scarcely conceivable that an agent, in working out his own happiness and acquiring virtue by attention and care, should not be in circumstances of some hazard; and if this is true, the enquiry concerning the origin of evil must be, not, why any Beings have been placed
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in a state of trial and hazard, but why they have been placed in a state of trial and hazard, attended with such and such circumstances of particular disadvantage and distress.

Upon the whole. We may, I think, perceive that it was necessary that there should be a real *contingency* of events in the creation, and such a subordination of Beings to one another and *precariousness* of their states, as could not but subject them in many instances, and especially in the infancy of their existence, to the danger of moral defection and a failure of happiness. There could not otherwise, it has appeared, have been room for a proper exertion of the powers of Beings, or for that *moral excellence* by which they most nearly resemble the fountain of all perfection. The *rightest* and also the *greatest* happiness could not have been attained in any other way. This appears to me with strong evidence, and the reasons that have been assigned

seem to prove it. — But it is time to return to what I intended here chiefly to insist upon.

I was considering the objection against Providence arising from the disadvantageous state we are in for virtue, and particularly, from what must have been the foreseen consequence of it ; that future *final* loss of a great part of mankind which religion teaches us to expect *. I have said a *great part* of mankind. How
great

* I beg it may be remembered that I all along consider the loss or destruction of the Being, as the main circumstance in the future punishment. My whole reasoning in what follows must appear trifling to those who do not attend to this; and if on this opinion of the future punishment the ways of God can be vindicated, there is no other which any person of much reflexion is likely to embrace, on which they may not be vindicated. — The difficulties to be removed are evidently much less on the supposition of the *ultimate restoration* of all mankind; but this opinion is by no means reconcileable to the language of scripture; and there is reason to believe, that the consequences of vice will be found far more terrible.

great a part can be known only to that Being who sees through all futurity, and who searches all hearts. — When I consider the carelessness which seems to prevail with respect to religious virtue; the inexcusable defects of some who are ranked among the better sort of men; the scope of the christian doctrine, and several intimations of scripture; I am indeed forced to entertain melancholy reflections. Every benevolent mind will, however, endeavour to think on this subject as favourably as possible. There is enough in the fact, as it must appear to the largest charity, to render it in the highest degree alarming, and to awaken in us the deepest concern for ourselves and our fellow-men. Millions of reasonable Beings naturally immortal and capable of infinite improvement, bereaved of all their hopes, cut off from every blessing of existence, cast away *for ever* from God and bliss, and sunk in *irrecoverable destruction*! — What can be imagined more shocking? — But though such a fact cannot but greatly affect an attentive mind, it

furnishes us with no just reasons for censuring Providence. God, notwithstanding, appears to be good, *infinitely* good. No conclusion to the contrary could be drawn, were there ever so great a disproportion between the number of those who shall be saved, and those who will be lost. One may even venture to assert, that it would have been worth while to have created this world for the sake of only *one* person to be saved out of it, and fitted in it for *everlasting* happiness*.—But, thanks be to *Divine* love, the virtuous and happy part of our species, when they shall hereafter

* This assertion cannot appear strange to one who does not forget what was said in the last note. Let the reader consider, what a difference there is between saying, that the *happiness* of one will make amends for the *misery* of millions; and saying, that the *everlasting* happiness of one will make amends for the *loss* of millions. The latter is my assertion and not the former. — *Everlasting* happiness is *infinite* happiness; and it is speaking very low to say, that the maintenance of a world for thousands of years, may not be too much to bring *one* person to it.

after be separated from the rest of mankind, will appear to be *a great multitude, which no one can number, gathered out of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues* *. Nay, we cannot tell how much greater a proportion they will, on the whole, bear to the rest of mankind, than the state of things hitherto in this world has given us reason to hope. For it is not impossible but that, before the end of the present state, a general reformation may take place, and knowledge, peace, and virtue prevail much more than they have ever yet done †. This many have thought a reasonable object of expectation,

* Rev. vii. 9.

† It is the opinion of some, that the world has from the first been gradually improving, and that it will go on to improve 'till superstition and wickedness shall be in a great measure exterminated. The advances and discoveries made within the three last centuries are, indeed, wonderful, and may well lead us to expect an approaching general amendment in human affairs. The light which has been lately struck out will probably increase; and the more it increases, the further will

tion, and it seems to be very plainly foretold in the scriptures.—But be this as it will ; while all *may*, a great number, we cannot

will free enquiry and generous sentiments spread ; the harder will it be for established corruptions to maintain their ground ; and the more the way will be prepared for the downfall of all slavish hierarchies and governments, and for the introduction of those times, when truth and liberty shall triumph over all opposition, when nation shall no more lift up a sword against nation, every false religion be destroyed, and the *kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ*.—I cannot think it necessary that the world should continue for ever divided, as it is now, into a multitude of independent states whose jarring interests are always producing war and devastation. A scheme of government may be imagined that shall, by annihilating property and reducing mankind to their natural equality, remove most of the causes of contention and wickedness. An account of such a scheme has been given by an ingenious writer in a book intitled, *Prospects of Nature, Mankind, and Providence*.—It is there observed, that if a government of this kind should be once established on any spot, the advantages of it would be so visible, and it would strengthen and extend itself so fast, that in time it would be very likely to become universal.

cannot doubt, *will* escape the fatal effects of vice, and be brought thro' the dangers of this world to endless blifs.—It may be enquired here, why the circumstances of the world have not been so ordered, as that this number should be greater; and some of the principal objections against Providence are reducible to this enquiry: But it is one of that sort of enquiries which has been before shewn to be unreasonable. It is an enquiry which might have been made, though this number had been greater, or though it had been so great as to include every individual of mankind. For, on this last supposition, the same general principle would have led an objector to ask;
“ Why are not more of mankind brought
“ on the stage, since more may? Why
“ is the earth so thinly stocked with them,
“ since it might have been always full?
“ Or, though always full, Why was it
“ not made larger, or created sooner?”
In short; had this earth been so little as to be capable of holding only a number of men equal to those who will be formed in
it,

it, as it is now, for future happiness, and had all these been so advantageously circumstanced as that not one of them should miscarry: Had this, I say, been the case, it would scarcely have been thought that there was room for complaint, or the least reason for questioning the goodness of the Deity. But to the views of benevolence there can be no difference between such an earth and the present, the quantity of happiness resulting from both being, by supposition, the same. This is true of two such states, abstracting from all connexions. What they may be when viewed in the relations they may have to other states, or when considered as parts of a system, it is not possible for us to discover. There may in this case be a preference due to the latter; or it may be the unavoidable result of a general plan of government productive, on the whole, of the greatest absolute good*. See page 127—131.

There

* I am sensible that many persons will think, that I ought here to have taken notice of the good
I which

There is one observation more of a particular nature on the present subject, which

which may arise out of the evil of the world, and the important ends which the abortive part of mankind may be made to serve under the Divine government. It has been said particularly to this purpose, that the future punishment of wicked men will be the means of displaying to the creation, in a manner not otherwise possible, the dreadful nature of vice and the perfect holiness of the Deity; that it is owing to them that the present state is a proper school of virtue to that part of mankind who will escape the *second death*, and that, for this reason, they answer an end like that of dung in a garden, which, though itself loathsome, helps the growth of some choice plants, which in proper time are to be removed to a more conspicuous spot, where they will shew themselves in their finished form and beauty.—Such is the doctrine which some of the best writers have taught; and they have added, that this doctrine ought not to have any influence on our notions of the evil of vice, because, whatever good may eventually arise from it in consequence of the disposals of infinite wisdom, its essential malignity is the same; it is always fatal to the individuals who practise it; and it still continues true, not only that its *tendency* is to ruin the creation, but that this would be its *actual effect* were it under no restraint.—I leave every

which is so important that it would be inexcusable to omit it. What I have in view is the conformity observed by Dr. *Butler*, between that loss of human creatures which I have been considering, and the course of nature in other instances.—Vid. *Analogy*, Part I. Chap. 5.

Almost

every one to determine for himself how far these observations are just. For my own part, I am afraid of talking much in this way; and, perhaps, it will in some measure appear from what is above said, that there is no great occasion for it in order to vindicate Providence in the permission of evil. It is right to think of vice as always an enemy to the world, and of the havock it makes among mankind as a *real* and great calamity. The founder of our religion certainly thought thus, otherwise he would not have stooped so low and suffered so much, to prevent the effects of vice and to save mankind. This appears likewise from the laws and threatenings of the Deity, and from all that we see of the order of his government. The wicked may with no less truth be considered as the *weeds* and *briars* that choak the plants, than as the *manure* that helps their growth. If the temptations and difficulties of human life are the means *sometimes* of improving virtue, by affording it exercise, they are also *generally* the very causes which overwhelm and ruin it.

Almost all kinds of vegetables and trees have a vast profusion of seeds prepared for them, far the greatest part of which is lost; and, in some instances, not one of them in many myriads grow up to any thing. The like is very observable in the animal world; and were one to enter minutely into this part of natural history, it would be surprising to observe what a superfluity of eggs is provided for some insects, what an inconceivable multitude of creatures are lost in embryo, or born only to be destroyed; and what great numbers of even those that proceed some way towards a state of maturity perish before they arrive at it.

Should it be said here that, as this world is constituted, a great waste of this sort could not but happen, which rendered it necessary that a considerable overplus should be provided; and that the greatness of the numbers lost cannot be regarded by a Being in whose eye nothing is great, to whom the production
of

of any one number of any objects is as easy as the production of any other ; and who, therefore, can with no more reason be censured for any such loss, than for the non-existence of the Beings he has not created : Should this, I say, be objected, it would be obvious to answer, that what is in some degree equivalent to it, may, with equal reason, be applied to the particular case under consideration.

In thinking of the analogy of nature in this instance, we should by no means forget the untimely deaths that happen among our own species. Many perish in the womb ; and the greater part of those that see the light, and are put in the way to the enjoyments and happiness of grown men in the present life, fall short of them, and are nipped in their bloom. Such facts as these have a tendency to make the deepest impression on every considerate person. They shew us that what we are taught to believe with respect

spect to the future lot of mankind is entirely agreeable to all that we see of the world *. Nor have we any reason for suspecting

* In order to give a distincter view of that part of natural history which I have mentioned above, I will recite the following facts: — Monsieur *Dodart*, in a piece communicated to the Royal Academy of Sciences, computes that an elm every year, at a medium, produces 330,000 seeds, and, therefore, supposing it to live a hundred years, 33 millions during its whole age.— Fern is vastly more fruitful in seeds.—Hart's tongue, as Dr. *Grew* calculates, produces in a year a million of seeds. “ There is an infinite diversity
“ between the places that produce and nourish dif-
“ ferent plants. There are some that are not pro-
“ duced but upon other particular plants, of which
“ the trunk, or the bark, or the roots have alone the
“ juice that is agreeable to them. What Monsieur
“ *Tournefort* has heard from Messieurs *Mery* and
“ *Lemery* is yet more surprising. There are a kind
“ of mushrooms which grow upon the bands and
“ plaisters applied to the wounds and sores of the sick
“ men in the hospital called *L'Hotel-Dieu*. After
“ this nobody will wonder that horse-dung prepared,
“ as Monsieur *Tournefort* mentions, should be a kind
“ soil or bed, capable of bringing forth the ordinary
“ mushrooms. It follows from hence, that the seeds

suspecting that this part of its constitution is faulty, as, I hope, the preceding observations

“ of mushrooms must be scattered in a pretty large
 “ quantity, in an infinite number of places where
 “ they never appear, and indeed over all the earth;
 “ and by consequence, likewise, the invisible seeds
 “ of a great number of other plants. — It must be
 “ owned that the imagination is shocked at first, with
 “ the consideration of such a prodigious multitude
 “ of different seeds sown every where indifferently;
 “ and in an infinity of places, in vain too. And yet,
 “ when one comes to weigh the matter, one must
 “ allow it. From whence come otherwise the marshy
 “ plants that are found in lands turned to fens, and
 “ which never appeared there before? From whence
 “ come those new plants that other accidents seem
 “ to have produced sometimes in certain places; for
 “ instance, the black poppies that grow in the burnt
 “ grounds of Languedoc, in Provence, and in the
 “ isles of the Archipelago, and which are seen no
 “ more the following years? From whence that
 “ great quantity of *Erysinum latifolium majus glabrum*
 “ which appeared after the fire of London upon more
 “ than 200 acres of ground where that happened?
 “ — These kinds of facts, and many others which
 “ one might alledge, equally incontestible, prove,
 “ at the same time, both the great multitude of seeds
 “ scattered

observations will prove. It is obvious that the main objections to it lead us equally

“ scattered every where, and the want of certain circumstances to make them appear.—If to this speculation on the invisible seeds of plants, we join that of the invisible eggs of insects, which is exactly parallel, the earth will be found full of an inconceivable number of vegetables and animals already perfectly formed and designed in miniature, and which only stay for certain favourable accidents to appear in full length.” *See the lives of the French, Italian, and German Philosophers, late members of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Paris, together with abstracts of some of the choicest pieces communicated by them to that illustrious society. By Mr. Chamberlayne.* — A spider lays, as naturalists tell us, five or six hundred eggs.—As the notion of spontaneous generation is now universally exploded, how shall we account for the insects that never fail to be bred in particular places, or for the animalcules that are found in certain infusions, after exposing them uncovered to the air, except by supposing that the eggs of these animals are continually wafted about every where in the air? What an infinity then of these eggs must be lost for want of falling into favourable situations?—Some have maintained that the bodies of all living creatures are produced from the animalcules *in semine masculino*, which

equally to object, in all cases, to the creation of a smaller rather than a greater number

when they happen to find a proper *nidus*, are there changed, and for some time nourished and enlarged, till at last the creature in its complete form is ripened for birth; just as all trees and plants proceed from a seed, which is nothing but the tree or plant itself in miniature, and which, upon being thrown into a proper soil, is there, not formed, but unfolded, nourished and increased, till it becomes a full grown plant or tree. If this opinion is true, it affords a most remarkable instance to the present purpose, there being no reason to think, considering the inconceivable number of the animalcules mentioned, that one out of many millions of them ever find the proper *nidus*, or actually give rise to the animals intended to be produced from them.—Exactly parallel to this, is the account given by naturalists of the construction and use of the flower which precedes the fruit, in plants, and trees, and of the manner in which the *farina*, or fine dust of flowers fecundifies the *germen* or seed placed at the bottom of the flower. Mr. Samuel Moreland in Philosophical Transactions, N^o. 287, (after giving an account of a well known part of natural philosophy, namely, that there is in every seed a seminal plant lodged between the two lobes which constitute the bulk of the seed, and are designed for the first nourishment of the plant) mentions it: s his opinion, that the seeds which come up in their proper

number of Beings. There is nothing like *injustice*, or even *unkindness*, implied in

involucra, are at first like unimpregnated *ova* of animals; that the *farina* is a congeries of seminal plants, one of which must be conveyed into every *ovum* before it can become prolific; that the *pistil* is a tube designed to convey these seminal plants into their nests in the *ova*; and that there is so vast a provision made because of the odds there are, whether one out of a great number shall ever find its way through so narrow a conveyance.—This theory has been received by Mr. *Geoffroy* and many others. It seems now pretty well confirmed, and has laid the foundation of the *Linnæan* system of botany. How remarkably does it shew us the analogy that runs through nature? How surprising to consider what an expence of *farina* there is to produce *one* seed, and what an expence of seeds to produce *one* plant?—Is it impossible that what is similar to this should take place in the formation of reasonable Beings in this world for happiness hereafter?—“ that the present
 “ world (says Dr. *Butler* in the passage above referred
 “ to) does not actually become a state of moral dis-
 “ cipline to many, even the generality, cannot be
 “ urged as a proof that it was not intended for moral
 “ discipline, by any who at all observe the analogy
 “ of nature. For, of the numerous seeds of vegetables
 “ and bodies of animals which are adapted and put
 “ in the way to improve to such a point or state of

in it to any Being. It is consistent with an infinite overbalance of good ; and, for these

“ natural maturity and perfection, we do not see
 “ perhaps one in a million actually to improve to it.
 “ Far the greatest part of them decay before they
 “ are improved to it ; and appear to be absolutely
 “ destroyed.—I cannot forbear adding, that the
 “ appearance of such an amazing waste in nature,
 “ with respect to these seeds and bodies, by foreign
 “ causes, is to us as unaccountable as what is much
 “ more terrible, the present and future ruin of so
 “ many moral agents, by themselves, *i. e.* by vice.”

There is a further circumstance in the constitution of nature applicable to the present purpose, which seems to be worthy of notice, and which I will mention as briefly as possible. — One of the most remarkable and distinguishing properties of human nature is, its *capacity of improvement*. What the lower creatures were at first, they are now, and probably ever will be. But this is by no means the case with men. Previously to all advantages from experience and instruction, they are nearly the savages described by Mr. Rousseau, (*See his Treatise on the Origin of the Inequality among Mankind*) or creatures running naked and wild in the woods, without reflection, without society, and without language. Compare them in this state with what they are capable of becoming by a due application of their powers, by the invention of arts and sciences,

these reasons, the mere circumstance of its unaccountableness as occasioning a

waste

sciences, and the establishment of the best schemes of civil policy; and a difference will appear not inferior to that between men and the lowest species of brutes, or between the wisest person on earth and a child just born.—This *natural improveableness* of the human race has never taken its complete effect. The greatest part of men have, from the beginning of the world, been in a state of darkness and barbarism. Many ages past before the discovery of any of those arts, from whence are derived the chief conveniencies of life: And though now, in consequence of the acquisitions of some thousands of years, human life in a few nations appears in a state of considerable order and dignity, yet still it is farther than can be well imagined, from having attained any where to a state so improved and happy as we see it to be capable of.—This loss of the effect of human improveableness will appear equally remarkable, if we consider the individuals of mankind.—Thousands of Boyles, Clarkes and Newtons have probably been lost to the world, and lived and died in ignorance and meanness, merely for want of being placed in favourable situations, and enjoying proper advantages.—Such has been the case with mankind, considered as designed only for existence in this world. But they are capable of existing in a

waste of being (which is the most that is puzzling in it) cannot be of any great consequence. The *seeming waste* may, for ought we know, answer important ends, and appear at last to be the greatest *frugality*. How hard is it that we should be willing to trust the wisdom of nature no further than it keeps within sight? How inconceivable is it that, in this or any other instance, a creature of yesterday and a reptile of the dust should be able to see further, or to contrive better, than that *original intelligence* from whence all things sprung?———I feel particular satisfaction whenever I make such reflexions, and therefore I hope I shall be excused if I am too often recurring to them.

I have now proposed the thoughts which have appeared to me of most consequence,

higher state. They are capable of an *endless* future progress in knowledge and happiness.—Can any one say, that the effect also of their improveableness in this respect may not fail in numberless instances?

consequence, towards reconciling our minds to our state, considered as a mixed and imperfect state ; a state of labour, temptation, and danger ; and a state in which many are likely to fail of future happiness, and to be lost for ever. Some of the observations which have been made on the head last mentioned, have gone on the supposition, that the virtuous part of mankind are not only to be equitably distinguished from others in proportion to the difference of their characters, but to be rewarded hereafter with an *endless life* in a state of ever increasing happiness. As we have reason to think this to be the fact, it makes no great difference with respect to the argument on which I have insisted, how it comes to be fact ; whether, for instance, it is to be considered as derived from the *original constitution* of the Deity, or as the effect of an *extraordinary dispensation* of mercy. In justice, however, to what the Christian Revelation has taught us, I cannot dismiss this subject without observing,

observing, that the latter is in reality the truth. The Scriptures are express and clear in representing Christ as the author of *eternal life*, or our *restorer* to immortality. The account there given seems to be, that we were indeed at first intended for immortality, but that in consequence of certain events at the commencement of the present state, we lost it, and were brought into such circumstances of distress as gave occasion to the interposition of the Messiah, by whose benevolent agency our race has been so far delivered, that all the truly penitent shall escape the *second death*, and be made happy for ever.—As one who believes Christianity, I am obliged to think this a true account; and there are several reasons which determine me to think it an account entirely credible. Death has in it all the appearance of being an evil for which such creatures as we are might not be originally intended. The best of us have exposed themselves to the consequences of guilt in many instances. I cannot

not conceive, why it should be thought unlikely, that *such* Beings should be in a state which (though perfectly right considered in its reference to the Divine administration) may yet be a *degraded* or *fallen* state, and such as might have needed such a Saviour as Jesus Christ.——

I should be carried far beyond the purpose of this Dissertation were I to say much more here. I will therefore advance no further than to offer a few hints, in order to shew what force some of the arguments already proposed have to vindicate Divine Providence, even on the supposition that our real state is that now mentioned.

It has been proved, I think, that there is no reason to look upon our present state as, in any respect, inconsistent with the perfections of the Deity *. Most certainly then,

* If any one should suspect an inconsistency in saying that our state is calamitous, and yet a state that displays God's goodness, and in which we might have been originally placed, let him put the case

then, it is a state into which he might have made us liable to be brought in consequence of any connexions proper to be established in the universe. We see among the *individuals* of mankind that, in consequence of their dependence on one another, they are often deprived of benefits which seemed to be intended for them by the constitution of the Deity, and brought into states which, tho' they give no reason for complaining of Providence, are yet justly deemed calamitous. How credible ~~is~~ it that there may also be events or connexions in nature by which, consistently with perfect wisdom and goodness, the like may happen sometimes to a *species*? The enjoyment of whatever is a favour in existence, may be made precarious in
any

case of a person fallen from honour, ease and wealth, to the cares, and toil, and indigence of low life; would it not be true, that the condition of such a person was calamitous? But might he not, as many actually are, have been *born* in it, and yet have abundant reason to be thankful for existence?

any degree the creator pleases, or suspended on any conditions that he sees to be most conducive to the ends of his government. The blessings which the Christian scheme supposes mankind had lost, they never had any right to. The Divine perfections certainly do not require, that such virtue as ours should be rewarded with the *Christian salvation*. Had our Maker intended us only for a *temporary existence* we should have had no reason for any other sentiments than grateful ones, provided we enjoyed *any* degree of happiness, and received universally an adequate retribution. But he has been infinitely more kind to us. That very constitution of his government which made us liable to be brought into that calamitous state which Christianity supposes, made provisions also for the possibility of our deliverance and restoration to the views of a happy eternity; and thus displays the highest wisdom and goodness we can imagine, agreeably to the observations in page 129

—132. But

But it is high time to stop. I feel myself in danger of going far beyond my depth. The ways and administration of the Deity must be *unfathomable* to us. Were they otherwise, they could not be *infinitely* wise and good. The origin of evil has been the grand subject of enquiry among thoughtful men in all ages, and various have been the sentiments about it. What has been now said on this point is offered with a deep sense of imperfection and blindness. Though it seems to remove some difficulties, it does not, I am sensible, remove all. What has been last insisted on should be particularly attended to. If, according to the scriptures and ancient tradition, our state is indeed a *fallen* state, the direct solution of the question concerning the origin of evil would be a recital of the manner in which we were brought into it, or a distinct account of those causes and events under the Divine government from which it is derived. But such an account, supposing
ing

ing it given us, we may not perhaps be capable of understanding*. We must therefore be much in the dark; and while we are so, while we see nothing but just the present moment, and know so little of the history of the universe, and its connexions and laws, it cannot but be unreasonable to pretend to be able to form an adequate judgment of our state, or completely to account for every circumstance in it. Every one who

* The account of the Fall in *Genesis* is far from being such an account as I here mean. It is, perhaps, in some measure *veiled*, or at least *partial*, and designed only to inform us that, whereas we were at first placed higher in the scale of being, we were reduced lower and sunk into our present *mortal* state in consequence of some connexions we had with superior orders of creatures, or of the agency of an *evil Being* represented by the *Serpent*; a deliverer being at the same time promised, who should *destroy the works of the devil*.—See the last essay in a book entitled, *Crito*, where a good deal that deserves attention is said by the ingenious and learned author, on the power of superior Beings and the connexions we may have had with them; and also, on another subject touched in page 140.

who looks about him must lament the degeneracy of mankind; and every one who believes the doctrine of religion must tremble for the danger he is in, and the multitudes who are likely to be lost. Instead of allowing ourselves to be very anxious about discovering the particular causes that brought us into these circumstances, our chief enquiry should be, whether, amidst all our darkness, we do not see enough to assure us that God is perfectly righteous in all his ways; and about this I can entertain no doubts, for the reasons I have endeavoured to explain.——But above all things, it is our business to take care of ourselves, to keep clear of the *corruption that is in the world through lust**, to strive to save our own souls amidst the dreadful wreck, and at the same time to do all we can to save some with ourselves. This is the great use which we should make of what we have

* 2 Pet. i. 4.

have reason to believe concerning our state;
and I wish I knew how to impress on
the mind of the person who reads this
a due sense of its importance. Without
doubt every other object of concern,
compared with it, is entirely trivial and
insignificant.

S E C T. V.

Of the Uses of the Doctrine of Providence.

IN the preceding sections I have considered most of the questions relating to the doctrine of Providence, which seemed to me of great importance. I have endeavoured to give a just view of the nature and proofs of it, but have not aimed at discussing every question that has been started about it, or insisting on every argument that might have been urged. In stating, particularly, the evidence for Providence, I have avoided entering into some reasonings which have a great effect on my own mind, because likely to be considered as too abstracted and metaphysical, and because also a full explanation of them could not be properly given in this
dis-

dissertation*. What has been said, however, will, I hope, be sufficient to convince such as will impartially attend to it, and
nothing

* Of this sort are the following observations, which I will just mention here, because it is possible that, without any particular explanation, they may appear to a few as important as they do to myself.——Since all limitation must be an effect of some limiting causes, it can have no place in an unoriginated nature. Unoriginated power, wisdom, and goodness, therefore, must be *infinite*. Wherever infinite *power* is, there must be infinite *knowledge*, it being contradictory to suppose that the power of any intelligent Being can extend further than his ideas. And, since the obligations of moral rectitude are founded in eternal truth and reason, where there is infinite *knowledge*, there must be infinite *goodness*. There is, therefore, a necessary connexion between infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. They are essentially one, and cannot reside in different natures. The sovereignty of the universe, therefore, must be perfectly wise and righteous; and all the order and beauty in the creation are to be traced up to one eternal and immutable principle of order and beauty, and of all that is venerable and excellent.——It deserves particular notice, that the necessary connexion which our own ideas teach us, in the manner just mentioned, between infinite power, wisdom and goodness, and which certainly is the most agreeable and important

nothing now remains but that I represent the proper improvement of this subject, and consider the influence which it ought to have on our tempers and lives.

Here, 1st. It should be recollected that the argument on which I have principally insisted in the last section, furnishes us with a strong reason for contentment. As this reason for contentment cannot be too much inculcated, I shall not scruple to recall some of the observations before made, in order to give a more distinct and full account of it.

The fact I shall go upon is, that happiness is *prevalent* in human life. This, I know, has been denied by some, but certainly without any reason. There is, in reality, no comparison between the
 blessings

of all truths, is exhibited to us in all that we see of the world ; there being no instance in which the *power* that made the universe has displayed design, which does not appear to be a *wise* and *kind* design. Compare the note in page 23, 24.

blessings and the calamities of life, or between the number of hours in which we enjoy some kind of pleasure, and those in which we suffer pain. What in some measure deceives us in this matter is, our considering every state in which we are not exempted from all uneasiness, as a state of absolute misery; whereas we may be happy, that is, the whole pleasure of existing may not be destroyed, under considerable degrees of uneasiness.——

We are, on the contrary, apt to consider no state is *happy* which is not attended with some sensations of positive joy; and this is true as this word has been generally used, but is far from being so if we apply it, as I now do, to any state or circumstances in which to *be* is better than not to *be*.——Life, though destitute of any particular gratifications, is naturally agreeable. Seldom does it happen at the end of a day that we have no reason to thank God for it, or that we can say with truth, upon reviewing it, that it has been a *miserable* day to us. A state

of some degree of enjoyment, or of exemption from all such distresses as take away, while they last, all comfort, being our usual state, it is what we look for and reckon upon; and therefore, whatever happens to put us out of this state, or to render existence a real burden, is the more observed and makes the deeper impression. And from hence it comes to pass, that one fit of sickness or disaster engages the attention, and furnishes with matter for conversation for months or years, while all the health and pleasures with which common life abounds, are overlooked and disregarded.

Supposing it then evident that the portion of good allotted to men exceeds the portion of evil, let us next enquire what reason they can have for discontent. Happy, in some degree, they feel themselves. If then they are dissatisfied, it must be because they are not *more* happy. But this is perverseness and presumption: For
if

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that

* No person of any reflection can imagine that this argument implies, that we ought not to use proper means to improve our circumstances, or increase our happiness. The most vigorous use of such means is consistent with the highest degree of submission to the Divine will, nay, is *required* by it. Whatever happiness lies within the reach of the powers given us, and we can innocently obtain, ought to be considered as a part of the happiness intended us by Providence : and it would be, not acquiescing in its disposals but thwarting them, to deprive ourselves of it by inactivity and negligence.

that nothing can be more absurd than discontent. It goes upon a principle which would level the whole universe, and sow uneasiness among all the inferior orders of Beings. The true language of it is ; “ I will be at the top of the creation. I will accept of no happiness short of the greatest that can be communicated.”—What can equal the arrogance of such a disposition of mind? How entirely does it unfit for existence under God’s government, where there must be subordinations and distinctions of all sorts and degrees? How base is it to complain of that Being who has given us all we enjoy, merely because he has not given us *more*, when, without wrong, he might have given us *nothing*? It becomes not those who are obliged for every degree of good to pure favour, to prescribe how much they shall have; or for those who might never have existed, to determine how perfect and happy they shall be.—We need not doubt but that it is for the best reasons, that our state is such as we find it. Our duty is to accept hum-

humbly that portion of bliss which falls to our share, to acquiesce carefully in our different stations, and to esteem every little which may be granted us a kindness that calls for gratitude. Thus shall we make the most of what we enjoy, act suitably to the relation of creatures, recommend ourselves to our all-wise Governor, and take the certain method to secure further favour *.

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* Vide Sen. De Beneficiis. Lib. II. Cap. 27, &c.
Non patitur auiditas quemquam esse gratum: nunquam enim improbæ spei quod datur satis est. Eo majora cupimus, quo majora venerunt—Nemo agit de tribunatu gratias. Sed queritur quod non est ad præturam usque perductus. Nec hæc grata est si deest consulas. Ne hic quidem satiat si unus est. Ultra se cupiditas porrigit, et felicitatem suam non intelligit; quia non unde venerit respicit, sed quo tendat—Querendo non efficiam, ut majoribus dignus sim, sed ut datis indignus.—What follows in Cap. 29. I shall give as translated by an ingenious friend.—“Why do you complain of your
 “condition as a man? You do not judge of the gifts
 “of God with equity. You find perfections in other
 “Beings that you have not in yourself. You make
 “comparisons and despise your own lot: So you
 “create

It will not be improper to observe here, that though I have argued on the supposition that happiness is prevalent in human life, yet we should, in reality, have no good reason for complaint, tho' the contrary were true, provided it was the effect of

“create uneasiness to yourself, because while you
 “muse on what you have not, you overlook what
 “you have; and accordingly you neither enjoy it as
 “you might, nor value it as you should. Surely,
 “it would be more *wise* as well as more *pious*, to
 “think of the advantages you have received, and to
 “acknowledge them with thankfulness; to remember
 “that as a *man*, you have the chief place in this fair
 “and beautiful world, and that God hath made *us*
 “*men* masters of all worldly things. You therefore,
 “who undervalue the gifts of God to man, reflect on
 “the privileges *we men* have received from him.
 “The strength which is above our own we have
 “means to subdue. The swiftness we cannot over-
 “take, we have other ways to overcome. What we
 “want in one respect is supplied in another. We
 “have a *soul* within us which is more than an equi-
 “valent for all other gifts. Look round then, and
 “if thou canst not find any other creature which
 “thou hadst rather be than what thou art, be thank-
 “ful for thy condition, and confess that God, in
 “very deed, hath been good to thee.”

of our own ill conduct. From this source, undoubtedly, proceeds our worst evils. Human life, as it is the gift of God, or as we might make it by behaving suitably to his intentions and studying to maintain tranquillity, is an unspeakably greater blessing than we commonly find it.——This observation places the absurdity of discontent in a light that cannot but impress every ingenuous mind. Is it not shameful to murmur on account of evils which we voluntarily bring upon ourselves, contrary to plain admonitions and warnings? Does it not infinitely more become guilty Beings who are so much the creators of their own sufferings, to accuse and reproach *themselves*, than to exclaim against *Providence*?

I cannot quit these reflections without adding, that the same argument with that now used to shew the folly of discontent in general, may be employed to shew the folly, in particular, of the inclination which many persons discover to complain, because greater light and evidence

evidence on several speculative points have not been granted them. Every man has light enough to act upon, and to direct him in his most important concerns. This is all we can have any *right* to expect; and to indulge discontent because we have not so much as we wish for, or as is necessary to satisfy curiosity, would be tacitly to assert that we have a right to be omniscient.—It is indeed our duty to strive to obtain all the light possible; but at the same time we should remember, that it is no small part of virtue to acquiesce in that degree of light allotted us by Providence, or which we are able to acquire in the faithful use of our faculties.—But to dismiss this subject.

I would further observe with respect to the proper improvement of the doctrine of Providence, that it ought to be always attended to and recognized by us. The care of the Deity, we have seen, extends to all events. Nothing happens without either his appointment or permission. It must be
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our duty to remember this, and to maintain a deep sense of it in our hearts. Nothing can be more reasonable than that we should look up continually to the Sovereign Arbiter of nature, expect success in our undertakings from him, and acknowledge him in all our ways. There is within us an unhappy proneness to sink into an insensibility with respect to him, and it is remarkable that the chief cause of this is the peculiar degree of our dependence upon him, and his being so much one with our souls that we overlook him. There is nothing so near us, and therefore, there is nothing that we are so apt to disregard. He is in every breath we draw and in every thought we think, and for this reason he engages not our attention ; and, because *every thing*, he becomes *nothing* to us.— Thus, in particular, his power is as much displayed in those events which are most common, as in those which are most extraordinary. But in the former we seldom take notice of it, whereas in the latter it alarms and terrifies us. Were the bodies on the
surface

surface of the earth to ascend into the air, or were the planets to fly out of their orbits, our thoughts would be immediately drawn to God's hand; but it affects us not in cases where there is much more reason to acknowledge it, in the tendency of bodies downwards, and the regular motions of the heavenly bodies. What comes to pass out of the usual course we are never backward to ascribe to him; but what is done constantly and regularly, we are ready to consider as coming to pass of itself, and requiring no cause. We should endeavour to guard our minds against this weakness, and study to acquire a habit of carrying up our views to God on all occasions. We may be sure of being right in doing this. The course of nature is nothing but his power exerting itself every where, according to fixt rules, in order to answer the best ends. The frame of the world must be in every respect what he has been pleased to ordain. By him it subsists, and *in him we live, and move, and have our being* *. See Sect. II. page 41—54.

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* Acts xvii. 28.

One cannot think, without concern and surprize, of the inexcusable degree in which some persons are guilty of that disregard to Providence, on which I am now remarking. They terminate their views in the objects of sense, and forget all superior and invifible power. They confider the Deity as either withdrawn from the world to enjoy repose in the extramundane fpaces; or, if neceffarily prefent to it, as an idle and vain-glorious Being, who is above concerning himfelf with any thing in it. They look no higher for the fource of any evils they fuffer, or bleffings they enjoy, than *chance* or *fortune*, or *fate*, and they are generally very well fatisfied if they can point out the *immediate* caufe of an effect without enquiring any further. This has been too true of even fome who have been diftinguifhed by the name of *Philofophers*. But it is impoffible that they fhould have any juft title to that character. It has appeared, I believe, that fuch a way of thinking is no lefs repugnant to true philofophy, than it is miferably gloomy

gloomy and discouraging *.——It is worth remembering, particularly, that the disposition to be satisfied with discovering the *immediate* causes of effects in natural philosophy, without carrying our views higher, argues exactly the same folly with that of a person, who should imagine that he had sufficiently accounted for the motion of a particular wheel in a machine, by shewing that it

* “ A little philosophy inclineth mens minds to
“ *atheism*; but depth in philosophy bringeth mens
“ minds about to *religion*.” *Lord Bacon’s Essay on*
Atheism.

“ In the entrance of philosophy, when the second
“ causes most obvious to the senses offer themselves
“ to the mind, we are apt to cleave to them, and
“ dwell too much upon them, so as to forget what
“ is superior in nature. But when we pass further,
“ and behold the dependency, continuation, and
“ confederacy of causes, and the works of Provi-
“ dence, then according to the allegory of the
“ poets, we easily believe that the highest link of
“ nature’s chain must needs be tied to the foot of
“ Jupiter’s chair; or perceive that philosophy, like
“ Jacob’s vision, discovers to us a ladder whose top
“ reaches up to the footstool of the throne of God.”
Mr. Maclaurin’s Account of Sir Isaac Newton’s Phi-
losophical Discoveries, Book I. Chap. 3.

it was turned by the wheel next to it, without extending his views to the skill of the artist, and to the spring, on whose constant action all the motions of the machine depended; or rather it argues the same folly with that of the *Indian* mentioned by Mr. *Locke*, who satisfied himself with thinking that the world was supported by an elephant, and the elephant by a tortoise.—It should, however, be observed here, that there is an extreme on the other side, which ought carefully to be avoided. I mean, the extreme into which those persons run who have recourse *immediately* to Divine power, in order to account for *every* event, and who are apt to look with horror on all attempts to assign the natural causes of events. The former extreme is *atheism*. This is *superstition*; and both argue great shortightedness and ignorance. But the last is perhaps the most excusable. We cannot say how far the dependence of lower causes on more general ones reaches, or how complicated the mechanism of nature may be; but we know that the Maker's agency is the

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primary cause which established all others, and to which all others owe their force ; and this proves, that there is a just sense in which we may ascribe to him every effect in the material world, and consider all that happens as the result of his will.

Thirdly. From the account that has been given of Providence we may learn the reasonableness of Prayer. Were it true that the Deity does not attend to our affairs, or that the series of events goes on in one immutable direction independently of him, no help could be expected from him ; nor could we be at all the better for any application of our minds to him, and therefore prayer would be an absurdity. But it has been shewn that the contrary is true. If I have argued right, the series of events is just what he sees fit to appoint or allow. He is intimately present with us every moment, observing all our thoughts, and disposing all the circumstances of our existence. The whole world is in his hand, and by an imperceptible direction of the operations of natural causes and of the thoughts

thoughts of mankind, he can over-rule whatever comes to pass, and grant proper answers to prayer.—The objection then against prayer, taken from the supposed unalterableness of the course of things, and the impossibility of deriving any benefit from it, consistently with the settled order of the world, is groundless.—If there is an all-directing Providence, nothing can be more fit than to endeavour to engage it in our favour. If we owe our whole happiness to God, and the entire fate of our Beings is determined by his will, it must be inexcusable not to acknowledge and worship him. If he governs all created existence, and nothing can come to pass contrary to his counsels, it is reasonable to seek his protection, to fly to him in danger, to beg his aid in accomplishing our good designs, to implore his blessing on our enjoyments and to recommend to his care those who are dear to us. Nor can any person, who has his mind duly impressed with a sense of the absolute dependence of all things on the Deity, omit these acts without offering

great violence to himself.—The belief of an omnipresent Deity prompts the human heart, with a force almost irresistible, to direct its desires to him. This tendency discovers itself in all mankind ; and as far as it operates, it implies a necessity of considering prayer as likely to be of avail to procure blessings for us. It may be well presumed that this sentiment of nature must be right ; and that the Deity does indeed either by himself or some intermediate agency, follow prayer with such blessings as it may be a just reason for communicating. Experience and observation prove nothing to the contrary. For, supposing the constitution of the world to be such as establishes an availableness in prayer, it must be impossible to distinguish the blessings which have this source from others. It is enough that we have reason to conclude that God is a friend to the pious and worthy, and that we see in general their state to be happier than that of the irreligious and vicious.—The opinion that the Deity has limited himself to a settled course of acting, or to general laws

laws from which he never deviates, has very little to do with this point. For let it be allowed to be true; Is it likewise true of all those subordinate Beings, who may be the ministers of his Providence? May it not be itself a *law* of his government, or one part of his settled course of acting, to make a proper difference between those who acknowledge his supreme dominion by praying to him, and those who do not?—But what is it informs us that the Deity never acts but by general laws? The reason I have mentioned more than once * for the establishment of general laws is far from being any just foundation for this opinion. Particular influences accommodated to particular occasions, though supposed not reducible to any general laws, may yet be agreeable to them, and entirely consistent with their inviolableness; as is shewn in the first and third sections.

It is necessary to add, that were there in truth, on account of the unalterableness of

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* See page 16.

the course of nature and the impropriety of adventitious influences, no benefit to be derived from supplications of the Deity, an inconsistency would be established in the constitution of the world ; for by the frame of our minds it would *dictate* prayer to us, at the same time that by fixing its unavailableness it had rendered it vain and impertinent. But this subject will come to be more amply discussed in the next Dissertation.

In the next place. God's Providence is the proper object of absolute confidence. We ought to trust in it with firmness, and to throw upon it all our cares. The belief of it should render us serene in all seasons, and support and encourage us in the worst extremities. It is impossible that any event in which our interest is concerned should be neglected. We are under the protection of infinite power ; and the charge of sovereign goodness. No perplexing fears, therefore, or desponding solicitude should at any time enter into
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our breasts.—One truth, however, let us carefully attend to. Let us remember that our trust in God's Providence ought to be regulated by a regard to the spotless purity of his character, and accompanied always with the practice of virtue, and our own utmost prudence and diligence. Without this our expectations from Providence are vain, and our trust in it will be presumption. What it is chiefly employed in is the adjustment of events to the different characters of moral agents. God is a *righteous* Being, and he can favour none but the *righteous*. If we are not of this number we have nothing to expect from him. His government, which should be the *joy* of the whole creation, ought to be a *terror* to us ; and it will be a necessary instance of its perfect rectitude to consign us over to punishment. It would be dishonourable to him to exercise goodness towards those who abuse his goodness and are nuisances in his works. It is not fit that rational agents should be made happy without their own active concurrence, and virtuous industry. But

these supposed there is nothing that should disturb us, nor is it possible that we should expect too much from the bounty of our Maker. After discharging our duty and making the best use we can of the powers given us, we have nothing to do but to trust our concerns with the Deity, to commit to him our whole existence, and wait quietly for the issue of present events, which will prove glorious beyond conception to every true friend of righteousness.

In connexion with this it must be observed that the doctrine of Providence is a source of the highest joy.—Were events under no good direction; did blind necessity or fickle chance govern the world, our condition would indeed be deplorable. We could look at nothing with any complacency. All nature would lose its beauty, and appear dark and desolate. But this is by no means our state. The order of nature is wise and good beyond all that we can ask or think. Almighty power, it has been shewn, united to perfect wisdom

wisdom and benevolence, is at the head of the universe, actuating all its parts, and presiding over all its events. What seems most formidable, therefore may sit easy on our minds, and infinitely more may be expected to take place in nature than the most benevolent heart can imagine. —How delightful are these truths? With what exultation and triumph should they fill us? —Do you suffer under any calamity? —Remember that the eye of the Deity is upon you, and that you can suffer nothing but in consequence of the disposals and counsels of his ever attentive and unerring Providence. Accept then your sufferings with a zeal becoming his faithful subject. Submit to them with loyal and hearty affection, and never indulge a repining thought. Wherein can your dignity consist except in having one will with God? Can you be displeased with what is *right*? Would you have the world governed *wrong*? —No degree of *improper* pain, no sufferings inconsistent with a perfect order of administration can

can ever find admission into the world. Our affairs, and those of our friends and of all our fellow-creatures, are, in every particular, under the management of everlasting and omnipotent reason and love.—Is not this what every heart must wish for? Is there any thing that we can possibly desire beyond it? What satisfaction should we feel in existence, to find ourselves in a scene so glorious, in circumstances so happy?——Did the universal order require us to sacrifice to it every advantage of existence, or were the subordinations established in the creation for producing the greatest good such as obliged us to give up all our happiness; though, in these circumstances, such a fealty of heart to the government of the universe as would cause us to *rejoice* is not perhaps attainable; yet, if duly prevalent, it would certainly produce perfect *acquiescence*. But this is a supposition that we have no reason for making. No such trial is put upon us. Our circumstances are infinitely happier.

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The universal order has already brought us much happiness; and we are assured that, if we avoid vice and discharge our duty, our happiness shall not cease at death, but be renewed in brighter regions, and there go on increasing and improving to all eternity.—Oh! ravishing hope.—Glory for ever be to that inconceivable grace which thus blesses us *.

Once more. I cannot help observing that the account which the scriptures give of the doctrine of Providence leads us to believe their heavenly original. It is not possible to consider, without admiration, the elevated descriptions which they give of God as presiding over the world, producing all the revolutions in it, and *working*
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* *The wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Rom. vi. 23. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us, 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.*

all things after the counsel of his own will *.

The whole history they contain is one uniform display of the Divine superintendency of our affairs.—It is an observation no less just than common, that there is this remarkable difference between the sacred history and all others; that whereas other histories seldom go higher than the passions of men and the powers of nature for the sources of the events they relate, this always carries our thoughts up to the *first* cause, and directs our views to God as the guide and governor of whatever happens. Thus; *of the sword or a famine, or a pestilence, it says that God sent it* †; *of every calamity in a city, that he does it; of the wind and the lightning, that they go forth at his word; of the rain, that he gives it; of the falling of a sparrow to the ground, that it happens not without him; of what seems most casual, that he directs it, and of the*
hairs

* Eph. i. 11.

† Is. xlv. 7. — Amos iii. 6. — Psal. cxlviii. — Prov. xvi. 33. — Matt. x. 29, 30. — Rom. xi. 36.

hairs of our head, that they are all numbered.——Such representations of Divine Providence, so agreeable to our best notions, and exceeding all that can be found in other writings, afford an internal evidence of considerable importance in favour of the scriptures.

But further. As the doctrine of Providence, supposed previously established, furnishes us with an argument for the scriptures, so these in their turn furnish us with an argument for Providence.—We see here that we have connexions with an invisible world of spirits, that there have been interpositions of superior power in our affairs, and that heaven does interest itself about us particularly and wonderfully.—But what I have now chiefly in view is, the argument for Providence arising from the completion of the scripture prophecies. There are in the Old and New Testament, many predictions of events very distant from the times when they were delivered, which
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are represented as sure to be verified by Divine Providence. The accomplishment of such predictions, when it happens, proves that the predicted events were indeed subject to the superintendency of Providence, and obliges us to conclude the same concerning all events. When we find, for instance, that the present state of the Jews and the corruption of christianity by popery were foretold, and the principal circumstances attending them described, some thousands of years ago, we cannot doubt but these events have been all along objects of the attention of the Deity, and happen only in consequence of his unsearchable counsels. —It is worthy of special notice, that the representation made in these prophecies of the *spotless* * *holiness* of the Deity as his most distinguishing attribute, and the chief spring of his actions in guiding events, proves further that the administration of the world is holy and righteous. —In short. The Bible gives us a history of
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* Rev. iv. 8.—xv. 4.

of all the great facts in which this earth is concerned from its creation to its dissolution. A considerable part of this history must be *prophetical*, and what we have seen verified of this part demonstrates that the writings containing it come from the author and ruler of nature. It likewise proves that the world is under a moral government, and that Divine Providence watches over it through every period of its duration. And, perhaps, the prophecies which still remain to be accomplished may some time or other afford a demonstration of these truths that will put to flight all infidelity, and convince and surprise the whole world.

It ought not to be forgotten on this occasion that there is one event, important above all others, which the sacred writings foretel, and to which, they acquaint us, every present dispensation of Providence refers. I mean the LAST JUDGMENT; when, we are told, every one *shall receive according to his works*, and
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the Divine moral government with respect to the human race shall be consummated; when the *earth with all her works shall be burnt up, the Son of man appear in power and great glory, and all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.* What we have seen verified of the scripture prophecies assures us that such a time is coming; and happy are those who are always thinking of it, and preparing for it.

To conclude the whole.—Let us labour earnestly to bring our minds into that temper which the doctrine of Providence requires.—Let us follow implicitly wherever it leads us, and make an absolute surrender of our wills to God's will, suppressing all solicitude about every thing but acting faithfully the part he has assigned us, maintaining inviolably our allegiance to his government, and
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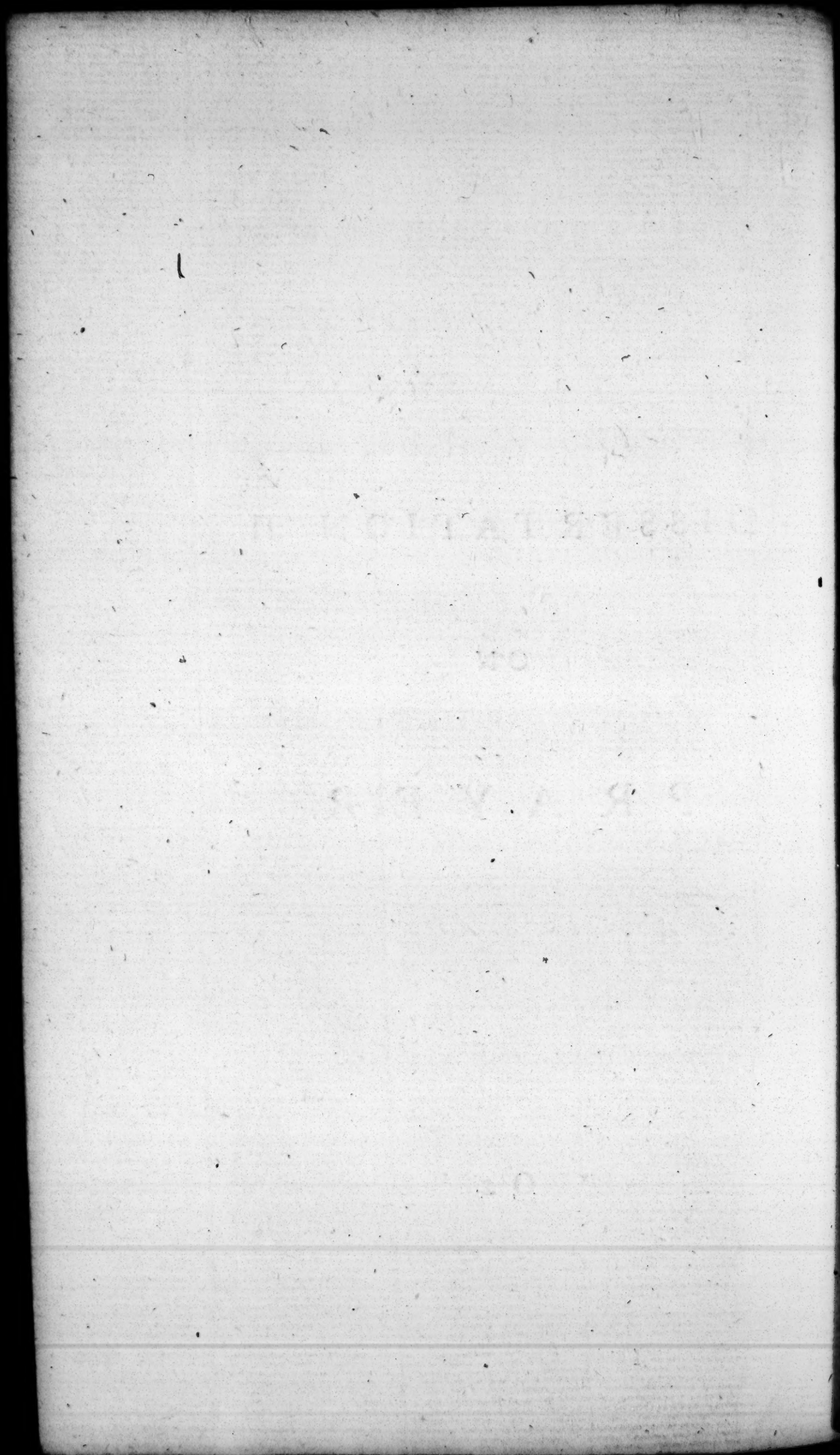
clap their hands *.——Praise him all ye
his angels. Praise him sun and moon,
Praise him ye stars of light. Praise him
ye dragons and all deeps. Fire and hail,
snow and vapor,, mountains and fields,
beasts and all cattle, creeping things and
flying fowls, kings of the earth and all
people; Praise the name of the Lord, for
his name alone is excellent.——Let the
whole creation join in raising one song
of praise to him.——Praise the Lord,
O my soul.

* Psal. xcvi. cxlviii, ciii,

DISSERTATION II.

ON

PRAYER.



DISSERTATION II.

ON

PRAYER.

SECTION I.

*The Nature, Reasonableness, and Efficacy
of Prayer explained, and the Objections
to it answered.*

HAVING in the foregoing dissertation endeavoured to explain and defend the doctrine of *Providence*, I shall now proceed to treat of the duty of *Prayer*. There is no religious duty against which more objections have been made. It will, therefore, be necessary to begin this dissertation with stating particularly its nature and reasonableness. After which, I shall give an ac-

count of the manner in which it ought to be performed, in order to render it acceptable and successful. These are the two heads under which I shall throw what I intend to say on the subject now before me.

By *Prayer*, I mean a serious and solemn address of our minds to the Deity, as the fountain of being and happiness, and the parent and governor of the world. It has been divided into several distinct parts, according to the several acts of our minds when engaged in it. The chief of these parts are the four following. Acknowledgment of our dependence, and of the Divine perfections and sovereignty. Thankfulness for the mercies we have received. A penitential confession of what we have done amiss; and offering up our desires of favour and happiness for ourselves and others.

Nothing is plainer than that the first of these is reasonable. Absolute perfection

tion of nature and character, and complete excellence, must be the properest objects of acknowledgment and esteem. Worship and adoration must be due to the Being who made us, and who possesses infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He who is supreme over all beings ought to receive the homage of all.

The obligation to the next part of prayer, or thanksgiving for the mercies we enjoy, is as evident as the obligation to gratitude in general. There is no clearer principle of reason, than that thankfulness is due for benefits received; and if that person acts wrong, who is not grateful to *human* benefactors, or who does not study in a proper manner to testify his gratitude, it is not possible that he can be innocent who is void of gratitude to the *Deity*; or who neglects to offer up thankful acknowledgments to the Being to whom he owes all he *is*, all he *has*, and all he *hopes for*.

The propriety also of the third part of prayer, or of a penitential confession of our guilt, is very obvious. — As far, therefore, as these constitute Prayer, there seems no room for questioning its reasonableness: And it should be remembered that in reality they are very important parts of Prayer.

It will, however, be objected probably by some, that all that seems necessary in these instances is a sense of the Divine goodness, and of our dependent and guilty state; and that where this sense and the proper reverent, grateful, and penitent dispositions are found, there can be no occasion for what is meant by Prayer.

I answer; that it is plainly proper not only that we should possess these *dispositions*, but that they should be drawn forth into *exercise*, and *expressed* by *particular acts* before the Deity. Good dispositions, when not attended with the
acts

acts which are the proper expressions of them, must be defective. Gratitude and repentance leads us in all cases to grateful and penitential acknowledgments. When in their due strength, they always produce these; and it is plainly fit they should.—It is incumbent upon us to testify our regards to the Deity in the best manner we can; but it would be absurd in any person to pretend he does this, who rests in contemplation, and avoids all direct praise and worship.

The last part of Prayer I mentioned was offering up our desires of favour and happiness for ourselves and others. This is what is most properly stiled *Prayer*; and it is what has been most objected to, and what therefore shall be now particularly examined. The difficulties which have been raised about it, would, I believe, have been little regarded had more attention been given to the native and uncorrupted dictates of
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the human mind on this subject. What is evident, if it be not so, that what we want from God, it is fit we should humbly implore from him? What common and unpervverted understanding can doubt whether there is a propriety in asking for the blessings and benefits which we must owe to his bounty? Is it possible that if we neglected this, it should be equally fit that we should be made happy by him? Who can help seeing that devout supplicants are more proper objects of favour than those who never pray, though it should be supposed possible, that, in other respects, their qualifications may be alike?—In short, the act of addressing our desires to God for the benefits which are necessary to our happiness, implies in it that sense of our dependance upon him, and that acknowledgment of his dominion which render it self-evidently proper. The fitness of it is immediately perceived by the lowest as well as the highest understanding; and the force of nature and reason will

will extort it from every mind that possesses a just sense of piety.

But let us attend to the objections that have been urged.

In the first place; it has been said,
“ that there can be no reason for Prayer,
“ because God, being *omniscient*, needs
“ not to be informed of our wants;
“ and being *unchangeable*, none of our
“ supplications can be the means of
“ making any alteration in him, or of
“ obtaining from him any benefits.”

Before I consider this and the other objections commonly insisted on against Prayer, I must beg leave to recommend to particular notice, that I assert that there is an *immediate* propriety or fitness in supplicating the Deity for the blessings we want. For the truth of this I appeal to every man's conscience. No words can make it plainer than it must appear by its own light.—Now
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the design of all just objections against Prayer ought to be, to shew that there is indeed no such *immediate* propriety in the act of supplication ; nor can any objections which have not this tendency, or which *suppose* that there is no such propriety, be of the least consequence.

Keeping this then in remembrance, let us consider the objection just mentioned.—The first part of it, or the assertion, that God, being omniscient, needs not to be informed of our wants, is entirely impertinent. For no one ever said that the design of Prayer was to inform the Deity of what he did not know. The plain design of it is, to *obtain* for ourselves the blessings we pray for. This is what every one must mean whenever he prays. It is implied in the very idea of the action, that we may think it has a tendency to procure for us what we supplicate. This tendency is founded on the *propriety* which I have said there is in asking for the benefits we want. Hence
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asking becomes a *means* of having, and is universally so considered. — In other words; asking, in a proper manner, for blessings from God has a tendency to procure them for us, because it is doing what is fit to be done, and what, therefore, God cannot but expect and require us to do as a *condition* of our having them.

Let us now consider what regard is due to what is said in opposition to this in the latter part of the objection. —

“ God, it is said, is unchangeable; and,
“ therefore, no prayers can be the means
“ of making any alteration in him, or
“ of causing him to bestow any blessings,
“ which he would not have bestowed
“ without them.” — I answer; it is true, indeed, that our prayers can make no alteration in the Deity; that is, in his *nature, character, or dispositions*. But they may make an alteration in the *external effects* of his agency, or in his manner of treating us. Nay, they *must* make such an alteration if they at all alter

alter our qualifications; or if offering them up is the performance of a duty, or doing what is proper to be done.—

The distinction between the perfections of God, considered as principles or dispositions in his nature, and the exercise of them in a course of outward actions, tho' an obvious and useful distinction, many seem entirely to forget. An assertion may be very just when understood of the latter of these, which would be very wrong when understood of the former.—

Thus, in the present case, though it would be improper to say, that God may be rendered more propitious or favourable in *disposition* to his creatures by any thing they can do; yet, surely, he may be rendered more propitious or favourable *in act* to them. That is; their actions may be the means of many effects of his favour to them. They may avert the consequences of his displeasure, and procure blessings for them which they would otherwise never have had.

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It is worth adding, that as we may thus by our actions obtain blessings for *ourselves* from the Deity, consistently with his immutability; so, likewise, may we for *others*. Or, what some Beings do for their fellow-beings, their benevolence, labours, and virtue may influence, though not properly the Divine perfections, yet the *exercise* of them. They may supply reasons to infinite wisdom for favouring others, and obtain effects of Divine goodness for them which they might else have wanted.———But to return. If it be really proper, that we should humbly apply to God for the mercies we need from him, it must be also proper that a regard should be paid to such applications, and that there should be a different treatment of those who make them and those who do not; and it must be exceeding frivolous to object, that this would imply changeableness in the Deity. God's unchangeableness, when considered in relation to the exertion of his attributes in the government

of the world, consists, certainly, not in always acting in the same manner however cases and circumstances alter; but in always doing what is right, and varying his conduct according to the various actions, characters, and dispositions of Beings. If then prayer makes an alteration in the case of the suppliant, as being the discharge of an indispensable duty; what would, in truth, interchangeableness in him, would be, not his regarding and answering it, but his *not* doing this.

Hence, it is easy to see that the notice which God may be pleased to take of our prayers by granting us blessings in answer to them, is not to be considered as a *yielding* to *importunity*, but as *one instance* of his acting agreeably to reason, or his suiting his dealings with us to our conduct. Nor does it imply that he is *backward* to do us good, and, therefore, wants to be *solicited* to it. This is no more implied in the case of Prayer, than
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in that of repentance, or any other instance of good conduct, when considered as obtaining for us blessings and favour. God is always ready to do us all possible good ; but there are certain conditions on the performance of which the effects of his goodness to us are suspended. There is something to be done by us before we can be proper objects of his favour ; or before it can be fit for him and consistent with the measures of his government to grant us particular benefits. We have a part to act, and duties to discharge, which, if neglected, cannot but deprive us of his protection, and leave us destitute and unhappy.

But I have, perhaps, bestowed too much time on this objection.——Let us then proceed to another on which great stress has been laid. “ Before we pray
“ we are either worthy to receive what
“ we pray for, or we are not. If we
“ are *worthy*, it is needless to pray because
“ we shall have what is proper to be
P “ given

“ given us, whether we pray for it or not.
“ If we are *unworthy*, no prayers can be
“ of any avail.”

The weakness of this objection will be obvious to any one who will apply it to a parallel case, and suppose it urged against repentance, or any other duty, when considered as a means of procuring blessings for us. “ Before we repent (it might be said) it is either fit we should receive blessings from the Deity, or it is not. If it is fit, we shall receive them, whether we repent or not; for God wants nothing to engage him to do what is fit. If it is not fit, our repentance can be of no avail.”— Every one will acknowledge the intolerable absurdity of such a way of arguing against repentance, and see that the full answer to it is, that *before* repentance it may be unfit that we should be favoured by the Deity, but that it may become fit *upon* repentance.—In like manner, the full answer to the present

sent objection against Prayer is, that *before* Prayer we may be unworthy, and that Prayer may be the very thing that makes us worthy. *Before* we pray it may be unfit to bestow particular blessings upon us, and it may be *therefore* fit to bestow them because we pray for them. That this is true is undeniable, if there is an immediate rectitude in asking for blessings from the Deity; for hence, as was before observed, it becomes itself *one condition* of having, *one* circumstance in our characters that contributes to render us proper objects of favour, or *one* part of conduct which cannot be neglected without neglecting what is reasonable, without neglecting virtue and duty, and *so far* disqualifying ourselves for receiving blessings.———Suppose two persons, in other respects of like qualifications, one of whom makes conscience of frequently and seriously addressing his wishes to the Deity for mercy and happiness. The other entirely omits this, and never puts up any supplications to him. Is it likely that both these persons

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will be treated alike? Does not the one *do right*, and the other *do wrong*? Does not the one act as becomes a dependent Being, and the other as if he was independent? May not the prayers of the one, as being in themselves reasonable acts and proper acknowledgments of dependence and indigence, be efficacious towards procuring for him some effects of *particular* favour?—On the whole; how evident is it that this objection, like the former, does not *prove* but *suppose* that Prayer is not reasonable?

It has been further objected, that meditation alone may answer all the purposes of Prayer, by fixing in our minds all those good sentiments which are expressed by it; and that therefore it cannot be a necessary duty.

As a reply to this it might be said, that meditation alone cannot so well and so effectually answer this end. But the most proper reply is, that it goes on the

the false supposition that Prayer is reasonable only on account of the good effects produced by it in our minds. There is besides, I have said, an *immediate propriety* in it. It is *in itself* a duty, like gratitude or veracity, independently of its consequences. It is not only an *expression* or *declaration* of good sentiments, but the *immediate exercise* of them in direct and explicit acts.

But still it may be pleaded, “ that the
“ dispositions or sentiments from which
“ Prayer should proceed are, in strict-
“ ness, all that can be necessary; and
“ that it is very unlikely that, while
“ deeply sensible of our need of mercy
“ from God and our dependence upon
“ him, and possessing the most fervent
“ desires of his favour and the most
“ humble and pious dispositions, we
“ should suffer merely on account of
“ our omitting all formal supplications,
“ which, when considered as directed
“ to a Being who perfectly knows our
P 3 “ desires,

“ desires, and who wants nothing to
 “ engage him to fulfil them as far as
 “ is proper, look more like ceremo-
 “ nious impertinences than acts of real
 “ duty.”

What is suggested in the latter part of this objection has been considered before. One can really scarce think it possible for an unprejudiced understanding seriously to determine; that addressing our desires of good to an omnipresent Deity, or supplicating him for benefits, is an *impertinence*, and not a *reasonable* and *proper act*.——With respect to the former part of the objection, it is enough to say, that desires and sentiments are far from being *alone* sufficient in any case. It is the *acts* in which they shew themselves that give them their worth and acceptableness. No pious desires and sentiments can be what they ought to be, which do not carry us to the acts that are expressive of them, and issue in devotion. Besides the desires and

sentiments, the acts themselves, as was before observed, are proper. Indeed, it is not conceivable that these can be separated. He who has the feelings that become a *creature* and a *sinner* will not stop at inactive desires and reflections. A conviction of indigence and dependence which has no effect in turning the soul towards heaven, and engaging it to direct its desires to him who alone can fulfil them, is as real a contradiction as a gratitude or benevolence which produces no acts of gratitude and benevolence.—— He that is possessed with proper affections to the Deity will *feel* the reasonableness of Prayer: He will be necessarily disposed to it, and incapable of refraining from it without doing violence to himself. A person who, with due attention and a right temper, considers God as his maker and preserver, the parent of the universe, the disposer of all blessings, and the source of all happiness, cannot fail to direct his heart to

him in humble and fervent supplications. The love of God in the soul and prayer are so inseparably connected that they are almost the same. No one who has a just perception of the dependence of all things upon God, and is pierced with a sense of the amiableness and excellence of his nature, can help falling down before him in prayer and adoration. No one who knows what he has done to offend him, who sees himself lost without his protection, and is duly conscious of his innumerable wants, can avoid flying to him for succour and mercy. One proof of this arises from the fact, that there are few who, in times of danger or any particular emergencies and difficulties, do not necessarily look up to God for help. It is the voice of nature at these times that God is to be prayed to; and indeed, in general, at all times, it appears to be the irresistible sense of mankind that Prayer is reasonable. There is as much a tendency in our
natures

natures to devotion as to food or society. Our native bent lies evidently this way, which never fails to discover itself in the most irreligious people, when calamities or death threaten them.

To the person then who alledges, that serious and frequent meditation joined with pious affections and desires, is all that can be our duty, and that every thing beyond is mere ceremony and folly; it will be proper to reply by asking—
“ Do you indeed practise such meditations? Do you possess these pious affections and desires, and study to cherish them by all proper means? Do you often set yourself to think of the Deity, to contemplate his perfections, to recollect his mercies, and to endeavour to affect your mind with a sense of your absolute dependence upon him? Can you truly say that you live and act under the power of religious principles and sentiments?”

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I may venture to pronounce that you cannot answer in the affirmative. It is, therefore, impertinent to make such an objection; nor are you properly qualified to understand the full force of the answer to it*.

Should

* “Gratitude, love, and esteem are affections which decline concealment; when they are lively, we are naturally prone to express them, even though they give no new happiness to their object.” *See the chapter on the worship due to the Deity in Dr. Hutchinson’s System of Moral Philosophy, Vol. I. p. 217.*

—“The human mind feels a powerful impulse urging it forward to beg God to bestow what it wishes for with vehemence: And this very argument which is urged against the lifting up holy desires to God (viz, that he is infinite in goodness, and willing to gratify them) is a principal motive for offering them up; and makes it impossible for a well-disposed mind to abstain from it.” *Dr. Leechman’s Sermon on Prayer.*

The impulse mentioned here and above, urging us to address our desires of happiness to God, being plainly natural, is to be considered as a direction to pray from the author of nature. The impossibility of avoiding it, where there are just affections to the Deity, is founded not only on this natural impulse, but

Should it be again asked, whether a Being would be less favoured by the Deity on account of his omitting Prayer, supposing this omission to proceed from nothing but a persuasion of its impropriety: It would be proper to give the same answer, as might be given to the same question, supposed to be asked concerning the omission of any other moral duty from the same conviction.

Once more. It may be said, that “the
“ course of things is unalterable; and
“ that, therefore, no answers to Prayer
“ can be expected, without supposing
“ God to work miracles for us, or to break
“ in upon the general laws and settled or-
“ der

but also on a fitness which in this case is palpable to every person. To repeat desires in our minds, being at the same time sensible that the supreme disposer of our lot stands by us and observes them, without ever directing them to him, or looking to him for the accomplishment of them; this implies a neglect of the giver of all good, so repugnant to the sentiments of the human heart and so criminal, as to be absolutely incompatible with right dispositions.

“der of the world.”—This objection has been distinctly answered in the Dissertation on Providence, to which therefore I must refer *. I shall only observe here, that under a perfect government there cannot be any such general laws, as are inconsistent with every person’s being treated agreeably to what he *is* and *does*; and that, consequently, since the discharge or neglect of the duty of Prayer is one important circumstance that goes towards determining the characters and deserts of Beings, there can be no such laws in nature as render it necessary, that reasonable Beings should be treated in the same manner whether they pray or not. This, indeed, is itself the principal law and the immutable order of the Divine administration, “that all Beings shall, on
“the whole, receive according to their
“works:” And it is of but little weight in opposition to this, that we cannot see distinctly in what manner the laws of
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* Page 178, &c.

the world operate towards bringing it about as the great end of God's government, and the last issue of all present events.

Hitherto, I have confined myself to the consideration of Prayer for *ourselves*. It may be thought that something further ought to be said in defence of Praying for *others*. — “ For what influence, “ it may be said, can our prayers have “ on the state of *others*? What benefit “ can they receive from our intercessions? Is it to be conceived that God, “ like weak men, may be persuaded “ by the importunity of one person to “ bestow on another any blessings which “ he would not else have bestowed, “ and for the reception of which no “ importunity can render him more “ qualified ? ”

The proper answer to this will appear if we consider, that it is by no means
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necessary to suppose that the treatment which Beings shall receive depends, in all cases, solely on what they are in themselves. This, without doubt, is what the universal Governor *chiefly* regards ; but it is not *all*. And tho' there are some benefits of such a nature, that no means can obtain them for Beings who have not certain qualifications, there are other benefits which one Being may obtain for another, or for which he may be indebted entirely to the kind offices of his fellow-creatures. An advantage may become proper to be granted to another, in consequence of some circumstances he may be in, or some relations in which he may stand to others, which, abstracted from such circumstances and relations, would not have been proper *. Nothing is more intelligible than this, or happens more frequently in the common course of affairs and events. The whole scheme of nature seems indeed to be contrived on purpose in such a manner,
as

* See before, page 207.

as that Beings might have it in their power in numberless ways to bless one another. No attentive person can consider without surprize how precarious the state of men in particular is left, and how dependent their most important interests are made on their conduct to one another. One end of this constitution appears plainly to be, to give us room and scope for the exercise of beneficence. And, in general, it is obvious that had the state and happiness of Beings been made otherwise than precarious and dependent in the manner we find them, all possibility of this virtue, and consequently the sublimest part of rational and moral happiness, would have been excluded from the creation *.

But not to insist on this. It is sufficient for my purpose, that the general fact is certain; that Beings may, in various ways, be the procuring causes of good
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* See the Dissertation on Providence, p. 127, &c.

to one another. So true is this, that almost all our happiness is conveyed to us. not immediately from God's hands, but by the instrumentality of our fellow-beings, or through them as the channels of his beneficence, in such a sense, that had it not been for their benevolence and voluntary agency, we should have for ever wanted the blessings we enjoy.

Let us now apply these observations to the case of Prayer for others.——
 Why may not this be one thing that may alter a case, and be a reason with the Divine Being for shewing favour? Why, by praying for one another, may we not, as in many other ways, be useful to one another? Why may not the universal Father, in consideration of the humble and benevolent intercessions of some of his children for others, be pleased often, in the course of his Providence, to direct events for the advantage of the persons interceded
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for in a manner that would not otherwise have been done?—No truly benevolent and pious man can help lifting up his heart to the Deity in behalf of his fellow-creatures. No one whose breast is properly warmed with kind wishes to his brethren about him, and who feels within himself earnest desires to do them all possible good, can avoid offering up his kind wishes and desires to the common Benefactor and Ruler, who knows what is best for every Being, and who can make those we love infinitely happy. In reality; supplications to the Deity for our friends and kindred, and all in whose welfare we are concerned, are no less *natural* than supplications for ourselves. And are they not also *reasonable*? What is there in them that is not worthy the most exalted benevolence? May it not be fit that a wise and good Being should pay a regard to them? And may not the regarding and answering them, and, in general, granting blessings to some, on account of the virtue of others, be a

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proper method of encouraging and honouring virtue, and of rewarding the benevolence of Beings to one another? — Perhaps, indeed, it may not be easy to conceive how much regard is paid, in the disposals of Providence, to the benevolent desires and virtue of some Beings in the treatment of others. Perhaps, there may not be a better way of encouraging righteousness in the creation, than by making it as much as possible the cause of happiness not only to the agent himself, but to all connected with him. There is no virtuous Being who would not, in many circumstances, chuse to be rewarded with a grant of blessings to his fellow-beings rather than to himself.

These observations seem to me sufficient to defend Prayer for others, and to shew that it may have an effect on their condition. Were it true indeed that it could have no such effect, as having of itself no influence on the characters or personal qualifications of those prayed for, it would be more difficult to defend it. — The

immediate view of every one in praying for another, as well as for himself, is to obtain what he prays for ; and did any one apprehend that the act of supplicating the Deity for others has no tendency to be of any advantage to them, I cannot see what could ever lead him to it. No one, I suppose, will assert that what we mean by addressing our desires to the Deity for *others* is some benefit to *ourselves*. It must, therefore, be wrong to rest the whole defence of Prayer on its tendency to promote our moral and religious improvement. This, without doubt, is in the highest degree true of it; but it is its *effect* not its immediate and direct *end*.

Several questions, not easy to be answered, may be asked about the *extent* of the efficacy of Prayer. But this is not a point into which it is necessary for me to enter. All I plead for is, that it is not absurd to suppose it *one* thing which the Deity is pleased to regard in the communication of good to his creatures. How

far it becomes actually a ground of favour, or what answers to it are granted in particular instances, we are not capable of determining. There is here, undoubtedly, room for much folly and superstition. Care should be taken that neither our prayers for ourselves or others be too particular, and that we indulge no other expectation in consequence of them than that, if the fruits of genuine benevolence and piety, they shall be accepted and heard as far as is consistent with the order of the world and the purposes of infinite wisdom.

It would be very unreasonable to urge on this occasion an objection already considered: that God is infinitely good, and wants nothing to engage him to grant any blessings to those who are not improper objects of them. Nothing is plainer than that this may, with equal force, be urged against any other duty of natural religion. The whole question is whether Prayer may not itself be a circumstance *creating* propriety and altering a case.

a case. For my part, I see no sufficient reason for denying the possibility of intercessions or interpositions which may make an infinite difference in the cases of particular Beings, and gain the highest blessings for them.—But it is time to finish this part of the defence of Prayer.

S E C T. II.

Of the Importance of Prayer as an instrumental Duty; the Happiness of a devout Temper, and the particular Obligation to public Worship.

THERE remain some further arguments for Prayer of great weight, which must not be overlooked. I have hitherto defended it without any regard to its effects on our tempers and lives; but it is necessary that these should be particularly represented, in order more fully to recommend and justify it.—Nothing, certainly, can tend more to promote a right conduct and temper and to establish within us all good dispositions, than this duty properly discharged. He that makes conscience of frequent and serious Prayer must live under an habitual sense of the presence, authority, and providence

dence of God, and of his dependence upon him and obligations to him. He must be continually reminding himself of the most important truths, and exciting himself to the utmost care of his life. He must be always exercising repentance for his transgressions and benevolence to his fellow-creatures. It is scarcely possible for such a man to be otherwise than truly virtuous. The indulgence of known guilt, and a regular course of unaffected devotion are so incompatible, that it is not conceivable that they can be united in one and the same man —— I acknowledge that there are many pretendedly devout people who are as false, spiteful, peevish and covetous and in every respect as unamiable as any persons in the world: And the scandal given by such has, I believe, contributed more than any thing towards bringing devotion into discredit. But what is the devotion of such?——

A mere lip service; not the work of the soul. The *semblance* of devotion;

not the *reality*. An abuse of the Almighty; not genuine worship and piety.

—Where the true spirit of devotion prevails, it cannot fail to render a man more amiable, and to promote the purification of his mind. It will stifle in the birth all wrong tendencies; subdue the temper to kindness and charity; conquer every rebellious inclination, and form the heart and life to universal goodness. Can a man set himself often to realize to himself the inspection of the Deity and to adore his perfections, while he feels himself an enemy to his laws and government? Can he with a contrite heart confess his sins, and not resolve to forsake them; Can he so mock his tremendous Creator as to seek favour from him while he goes on to affront him; or to beg that love and forgiveness to *himself* which he is not willing to practise to *others*? Can he pray for those who *despitefully use* * *him and persecute him*, and at the same time indulge rancour
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* Matt. v. 44.

in his heart? In short; can he employ himself in turning his attention frequently to eternal righteousness and goodness, without participating of some degrees of these excellencies; or preserve a constant intercourse between his mind and the first and best of all Beings, without growing like to him and being confirmed in pious gratitude and resignation?—

'Tis one of the justest observations, that what we don't think of is the same to us as if it did not exist. There is little or no difference between what is not *considered* and what is not *believed*. It is the *reflexion* on what is believed that renders it useful to us, and gives it its whole power to influence us. The practice, therefore, of stated Prayer must be of unspeakable use, as it is perpetually fixing our reflections on those truths which are the springs and supports of goodness. There is nothing does this so well. There is nothing engages the attention so closely to the most important truths, and consequently nothing that

that has so much power to excite good affections, and to keep alive and confirm good resolutions. I will venture to add, that for this reason it must be the best means of preparing our minds for Divine influences, and of drawing into them those irradiations of Divine grace which upright and pure minds have reason to expect. When in the midst of the hurry of life and full of its cares, our minds are not properly susceptible of good impressions. But when we retire from the world, and employ ourselves in the duties of devotion, all sensible objects lose their power; the tumults of passion subside; the voice of the Deity within us is capable of being heard, and our breasts are thrown open to heavenly communications.

We may then lay it down as certain, that Prayer is in the greatest degree subservient to virtue, and productive of the highest advantages. 'Tis in this that
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the conversion of the soul to religious goodness generally first shews itself. 'Tis the best friend of every virtue, a faithful monitor in all seasons, a powerful quickener in every laudable undertaking, and one of the chief springs of that wisdom which is from above, and that peace which the world cannot give.

But it must be here attended to, that though Prayer is instrumental to virtue in the manner now represented, it is by no means *merely* an *instrumental* duty. This must be acknowledged if what has been before said is just. It appears to me unquestionable that it is a prime and original duty of natural religion, which derives its obligation, not *solely* from its effects, but is of *intrinsic* obligation and rectitude.———I must add, that it is the highest possible recommendation of Prayer, that it is not only *itself* virtue, but the *best means* of virtue; not only itself a duty, but of the greatest use

use to maintain and increase a regard to all other duties.

What has been last insisted on naturally leads to an observation proper to be just mentioned, and which will set the reasonableness of Prayer in a light somewhat different from that in which we have hitherto viewed it.—Suppose that it had no *immediate* propriety in it, yet if it is so important a means of virtue, and so useful towards impressing on the mind pious sentiments; if without it we should necessarily grow more remiss and careless, less mindful of the Deity, and less affected with his perfections; this alone affords to the Deity the highest reason for commanding it, and making the regular discharge of it a standing law of his government, and a standing condition of his favour.——And as in the representation before given of Prayer, it implied no reflexion on the goodness of God, to maintain that he expects us to do what we *ought* to do; that is,
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addresses him and *ask* for blessings before we *have* them : So here, there is plainly much less reason for such an objection ; our ideas of Divine goodness being not diminished but magnified by supposing, that he makes solemn acts which are conducive to our highest perfection necessary to our being favoured by him.

Before I proceed further, I cannot help stopping to take notice on this occasion particularly of the *intercessionary* part of Prayer, as a most obvious instance of the tendency of Prayer to improve us. — No one can avoid seeing how happy an effect this must have in sweetening our tempers, in reconciling us to all about us, and causing every unfriendly passion to die away within us. We cannot offer up prayers to God for our fellow-men, without setting them before our minds in some of the most engaging lights possible ; as partaking of the same natures with ourselves, liable to the same wants and sufferings, and in the same helpless

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circumstances; as children of the same father, subjects of the same all-wise government, and heirs of the same hopes. He who prays for others, with understanding and sincerity must see himself on the same level with them; he must be ready to do them all the good in his power; he must be pleased with whatever happiness they enjoy; he can do nothing to lessen their credit or comfort; and fervent desires will naturally rise within him, while thus engaged, that his own breast may be the seat of all those good dispositions and virtues which he prays that they may be blest with. Resentment and envy can never be indulged by one who, whenever he finds himself tempted to them, has recourse to this duty, and sets himself to recommend to the Divine favour the persons who excite within him these passions. No desire of retaliation or revenge, nothing of unpeaceableness, ill-nature, or haughtiness can easily shew itself in a heart kept under this guard and discipline.

cipline. How is it possible to use *him* ill for whom we are constant advocates with God? How excellent a parent or friend is *he* likely to make, who always remembers before God the concerns and interests of his children and friends, in the same manner that he remembers his own? Is there a more rational way of expressing benevolence than this; or a more effectual way of promoting and enlarging it? ——— Nothing is more desirable or more delightful than to feel ourselves continually under the power of kind affections to all about us. Would we be thus happy? Would we have our hearts in a constant state of love and good-will? Would we have every tender sentiment strong and active in our breasts? ——— Let us be constant and diligent in this part of devotion, and pray continually for others, as we do for ourselves.

I might in this manner go through all the different parts of Prayer, and
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point out particularly the happy influence which they are fitted to have on our tempers and conduct. But this would be, in a great measure, a needless work; it being hardly possible to doubt on this point.

From the whole of what has been said we may now collect the following reasons for Prayer, which deserve our careful attention.

1st, It is in itself necessarily right. We cannot omit it without violating the plainest reason; without contradicting the highest relations in which we stand; and, in effect, setting ourselves up as self-sufficient and independent. Nothing can be criminal if it be not so to forget Him from whom alone comes every good gift; to neglect Him who is the bliss of all nature. Shocking, certainly, is the guilt of every irreligious person. He should blush to lay any claim to true worth of character.

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2dly, Prayer is necessary to promote a good temper in us, and to train us up in righteousness. Without it all our virtues will wither, our good desires and resolutions will languish, and religious truth lose its power over our minds. Prayer rightly performed implies the lively exercise of love, gratitude, humility, repentance, hope, resignation, and almost all the worthy principles that can actuate the heart. When this is neglected they lie dormant, and must tend to decay.——As a heart overflowing with love to God and man will unavoidably give itself vent in Prayer; so Prayer has a tendency to carry this blessed temper to its highest pitch; nor is it easily to be conceived how friendly an influence these have on one another, or how closely they are connected.——Nothing can be more sublime than a spirit of unaffected and zealous devotion. A heart inspired with this must be holy and pure, prepared for every good work, and filled with every

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Divine grace. This sacred fire, wherever it enters, will consume the dross of the mind and refine all its powers. Serious and attentive Prayers bring us to a nearer view of the Divine perfections, and draws light and glory from them into our hearts. By this we elevate ourselves above sensible objects, unite our souls to the first good, surrender our wills to God's will, and maintain in ourselves a constant and cheerful acquiescence in that order of events which his wisdom has appointed.—In short, Prayer is the main duty of religious virtue; the nearest approach to God we are now capable of; the immediate exercise of our noblest affections on their highest object, and the support and life of all true piety.

3dly, It is incumbent upon us to pray as we hope for the favour of God. This is *one* qualification for his favour; *one* important means of obtaining blessings from him. Those who omit it must
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be under his displeasure; but those who acknowledge him in all their ways, and live under a sense of his rightful dominion expressed by all suitable actions, must be approved by him, and the objects of his peculiar care. It is impossible that he should not make a difference between them and the impious men who address no acknowledgments to him.

To these arguments for Prayer, taken from what has been said to shew the reasonableness of it, I will add that the Christian revelation enjoins it. This, I know, will weigh but little with most of those who object to this duty. But it must have great weight with every attentive Christian.—Our holy religion exhorts us *to pray without ceasing; to pray always with all manner of prayer, and supplication in the spirit; to continue in prayer, and watch unto the same with thanksgiving; to lift up every where holy hands without wrath or strife, and to make supplications*

and intercessions for all men, since this is good and acceptable in the sight of God. This duty is particularly recommended to us by the example of Christ himself, the founder of our faith and hopes*. The accounts we have of the time he spent in devotion, and of his regularly performing all the offices of it, prove that this must be an important part of righteousness, and that there is no virtue so perfect, or dignity of character so great as to supersede the reasons on which the obligation to it is founded. Such imperfect and sinful creatures as we are have certainly peculiar reasons for it, and therefore must be in the highest degree inexcusable if they neglect it.—— But further; Christ has encouraged us to this part of duty by promising particular favour to those who diligently practise

* Matth. xiv. 23. *When he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray.* Luke vi. 12. *He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

practise it. That efficacy of Prayer to obtain blessings for us which I have endeavoured to prove and explain, is by him clearly asserted. Thus *Matth. vii. 7.* *Ask and ye shall have. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth. He that seeketh, findeth. And to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Matth. vi. 6.* But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and pray to the Father in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. ——— To the same purpose he has taught us in the parable of the widow and unjust judge. *Luke xviii.*

But let it be remembered, that though Christianity thus commands Prayer, it is by no means merely a Christian duty. It is an essential part of all religion. All nations of men acknowledge the obligation to it, and the practice of it has been as universal as the belief of a Deity.

In the last place. I would recommend this duty from the consideration of the pleasures that attend the due discharge of it. Prayer, as has been before observed, is the exercise of our highest affections on their highest object, and the intercourse of our minds with uncreated and sovereign goodness. It must, therefore, be the foundation of the highest pleasure.—It is also in Prayer that the happiness arising from the practice of virtue, and the hope and triumph it inspires are chiefly felt. At no other time are we so open to the causes of virtuous pleasure, or so disposed to the most joyous and exalting reflexions. It is in the power of every one who will make the experiment, to satisfy himself about this. What delight does a virtuous man often feel when he puts himself solemnly into the presence of his Maker, and considers him as one with his soul and as observing every motion within it; when he implores all suitable blessings from him, with a lively faith in his
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readiness

readiness to give him more than he can ask or think; when he adores his inconceivable excellencies, and magnifies and blesses that love which gave being to the world; when he commits his whole existence to him with boundless hope, and gives full scope to every pious and grateful affection? What rapture and ravishment attend such exercises, and how high do they lift our souls*?——Words are indeed wanting here; nor is it possible properly to describe the pleasure there is in all the

* “ In these the soul is enlightened, enlarged,
“ raised, ravished. In these it soars up to heaven,
“ and looks down upon earth. In these it possesses
“ stability and security, peace and rest in the midst
“ of a frail unstable nature, and a restless and
“ tumultuous world. In these all the passions of
“ the soul are exercised with a most tender sensible
“ delight, sorrow, fear, or reverence. Hate and
“ indignation do here express themselves to the
“ height, not only without any disorder or torture,
“ but also with great contentment and satisfaction
“ of our nature. Love, hope, joy reign here
“ without either check or satiety.” *Dr. Lucas’s*
Enquiry after Happiness. Vol. I. p. 117.

the acts of devotion; in addressing our desires, with a pure heart, to our almighty parent; in praising him for his innumerable benefits; in beseeching him to cause us to grow in every amiable disposition; in interceding with him for those we love; in feeling benevolence, gratitude, and hope kindling within us before his eye; in spreading our wants and perplexities before him, and seeking direction and help from him; in throwing our cares and burdens upon him, and referring ourselves to his disposal, so as not to retain any *wish* of any thing which he is pleased to forbid or deny. Even the tears of penitential sorrow and contrition, or of sympathy and benevolence, into which a devout person may sometimes be melted, have a sweetness in them not to be expressed, and are more to be desired than the greatest joys of the irreligious.—Am I, reader, now talking to you a language you do not understand? Have you never felt any of the pleasures I am now speaking

speaking of? Do you not know what it is to look up to God in private and to pour out your soul before him?—— Unhappy then are you, and a stranger yet to what you ought to be best acquainted with.

In order to obtain a just sense of the pleasures connected with devotion, it should be remembered with how much more force our affections ought to exert themselves before the Deity than in any other circumstances, and what greater influence his presence ought to have over us than the presence of inferior Beings. It is certain that we have more to do with him than with all nature, that he may be infinitely more our happiness than any of those objects which he has adapted to our faculties, and that the nearest and most important of all relations is that between a *creature* and the *Creator*. The approach, therefore, of an upright mind, possessed of just views and proper feelings, to the Deity,

to its guardian and life and greatest friend, cannot but be productive of the highest effects.——But it will not be amiss, on this occasion, particularly to compare the pleasures of devotion with those arising from contemplating the works of the Deity. In studying the laws and order of the universe we converse only with effects, but in devotion our minds are turned immediately to the cause, and contemplate, not the *shadows* or *signs* of wisdom, power, and goodness, but these qualities themselves as they exist in the necessary nature of the Deity. How much higher objects of contemplation and admiration must uncreated excellence and absolute perfection be, than any traces of these or emanations from them? 'Tis in God alone, in the supreme intelligence which fills all things and from whence all order and good sprung, that we can find complete fulness of all that is lovely and beautifying, and where every power within us can have room for its utmost exertion.

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It cannot be doubted but that the pleasures I am now speaking of will constitute a principal part of our happiness in every future period of our existence. We can indeed enjoy them but very imperfectly here. Many low cares and desires are continually forcing themselves into our minds, and distracting their attention, and rendering it impossible for us to disengage them enough from sensible objects, and to acquaint ourselves with God in the manner we desire. But hereafter we may hope to get nearer access to him, and obtain clearer views of his glory and majesty. All that now retards the flight of our souls to him and checks their happiness in him will be removed. Every cloud that now hides him from our sight will vanish, and we shall be able to feel his presence with us in a manner we cannot now conceive. How high then will the pleasures of devotion rise? With what ardor and transport shall we be able to worship and to praise him, to cast our
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souls before him, and to delight ourselves in him? — But let it be remembered, that this is a happiness which will never be enjoyed by any who forget God now. If we allow ourselves in guilt and irreligion, or cultivate no acquaintance with the Deity in this life, we cannot be fit for seeing him and dwelling with him in another life. A course of present devotion, as it will give us some foretastes of the happiness of heaven, is also necessary to inure us to it and prepare us for it.

I cannot omit observing further, under this head, that devotion is not only, in the *immediate exercise* of it, thus a source of happiness, but also constitutes a general temper conducive in the highest degree to happiness. The spirit of Prayer is the spirit of hope, humility, gratitude, and resignation; and must, therefore, as far as we are possessed of it, be productive of an inward satisfaction and tranquillity which are preferable to all
sensible

sensible delights. A mind thus turned has many sources of pleasure peculiar to itself. 'Tis elevated above the tumults of this world, and can preserve self-enjoyment in all circumstances, and take up its rest in God in the midst of outward troubles and calamities.——

A truly devout temper is indeed the very temper of bliss. It cherishes and strengthens all the tender and agreeable affections, and checks all the turbulent and painful ones. 'It disposes us to receive pleasure from every object about us, gives new lustre to the face of nature, renders every agreeable scene and occurrence more agreeable, heightens the relish of every common blessing, and improves and refines all our enjoyments. How blest is that man whose desires are continually directed to heaven; who is always exercising gratitude to the Deity and trust in him; whose heart is kept close with him, and whose thoughts are full of him; who tastes his beneficence in whatever gives him pleasure; who
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terminates all his views in him, and has learnt to carry his attention from every degree of beauty and good, in created Beings, to the inexhaustible fountain of all beauty and good? What peace and serenity must fill a mind assured that its affairs are under the *best* direction; conscious of its interest in almighty love; and whose regard is habitually fixt on that unsearchable wisdom which conducts all events?

I will add, that devotion greatly improves the pleasure attending all enquiries into nature, and advances in the knowledge of it. The difference between the pleasure received by a devout and an indevout mind in observing the universe, is like that between the pleasure received from the same cause by a man and a brute. 'Tis the consideration of the universe as God's work, and the observation of his power, wisdom, and goodness displayed in it, that clothe it with its chief beauties, and render it

it in the highest degree a delightful spectacle. There is no greater incentive to devotion than an attentive consideration of the glorious order of nature; nor is there any tendency within us more natural than that arising from hence to religious adoration. And there is an inexpressible pitifulness in the character of a man who stifles this tendency; who confines his views to *second* causes, and forgets the *first*; who sees not the Deity in his works; who devotes his time to philosophical researches, but satisfies himself with mere speculation, who can survey the world, enjoy its pleasures, and reflect on its wonderful structure, without lifting up his heart to the author of it, without being warmed into praise, or feeling any pious and devout emotions.—Admiration is one of the most pleasing affections of our natures; and this cannot but be excited in the most insensible mind, upon observing the works of the creation. But then only is our admiration what it ought to

to be, and the pleasure attending it complete, when it is exalted into devotion. 'Tis devotion that consecrates knowledge and renders it subservient to its proper end; that gives unbounded scope to our most raised affections, and employs our faculties on an object every way adequate to them.

Thus we see what reasons there are for Prayer, and what motives we have to practise it.—The natures of things render it our indispensable duty. Our improvement in true virtue, and even its very being within us, depend upon it. The uncorrupted dictates of our own minds, and the general sense and voice of mankind proclaim the fitness of it, and call us to it. The favour of God to us; our interest in the protection and blessing of his all-disposing Providence, and the supply of our various wants are in a great measure connected with it. The Christian revelation enjoins it; and it is, moreover, a means
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of maintaining communion between heaven and our minds, a source of pleasure of the highest kind, and a necessary preparation for eternal happiness.—If then we value *all* that is most important, or if the plainest and strongest considerations of reason, duty and interest can influence us, we shall not live in the omission of Prayer.

What I have hitherto said is applicable chiefly to *private* Prayer. I shall now beg leave to add a few observations particularly on *family* and *public* Prayer.

If the former is right, there can be no doubt but that the latter is so likewise. There are few or no objections to the one, which may not be equally made to the other. We are to consider ourselves not only as private persons, but as members of families and of society, and in these capacities ought to offer up praises and supplications to God.

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With respect to *family* Prayer, I cannot help asking with seriousness and concern ; where the religion of that family can be that never meets for religious worship ? With what reason can such a family expect the blessing of heaven upon it ? Is it not fit that those who live together in the same house, and are connected to one another by the closest ties ; who in common depend entirely upon God, need continually his care, and are always receiving mercies from him ; is it not fit, I say, that these should also join together in owning their common dependence and obligations, in seeking that protection they need, and in paying homage to their great preserver and guardian ? Can they imagine that they will on the whole do equally well, whether they make conscience of this or disregard it ? Is it of no importance that those who have children or servants under their care should endeavour to teach them the fear of God, and do what they can to
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instil good principles into them, to keep them mindful of their duty, and preserve them from the greatest of all dangers; the danger of losing eternal happiness, and being undone for ever by guilt and irreligion? Is it incumbent on them to provide for their *bodies*; and ought they to take no care of their *souls*, of their reasonable and immortal part? But how little care of this kind can be taken, and under what great disadvantages must children and servants lie, if those who have the direction of them seldom or never call them together to worship God?

——— Surely that religion must be very careless, which extends not to our families, and suffers us to forget God in them. And we ought to remember that a *careless* religion is likely to prove an *insufficient* religion.——— In a word. If the chief interests of a family are to be consulted, or the first of all the relations in which we stand to be regarded, family Prayer is reasonable and proper; nor can

any person deny this with any colour of reason, who acknowledges the obligation to pray at all. If then it is reasonable and proper, how can the stated omission of it be reconciled to a character of sound virtue?——“ Constant family worship
“ (says the excellent Archbishop *Tillotson*)
“ is so necessary to keep alive a sense of
“ God and religion in the minds of men,
“ that I see not how any family that
“ neglects it can in reason be esteemed a
“ family of Christians, or indeed to have
“ any religion at all.”

I know of no tolerable plea that can be found for the omission of this duty. There is no master of a family who should not be ashamed to say that he cannot find time (suppose one quarter of an hour in every day) for one of the most important and reasonable of all works. And there have been so many good forms of prayer for the use of families published, that no one can plead
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want of abilities who is at all able to read.

Let us next turn our thoughts to public worship.

It is very evident that in consequence of the principle of sympathy in the human heart, every act or service in which we engage in company with one another is likely to be performed with more delight, and to be productive of greater effects. Our affections operate in society with particular force. We are naturally warmed by the presence of one another, and insensibly catch one another's feelings. This, I think, suggests a reason of great weight for the public exercises of religion; for it proves that they have a particular tendency to impress the minds of men, and to do them good.—— But not to insist on this.—— 'Tis surely a most obvious principle of natural religion, that God ought to be publicly worshipped. Nothing can be more

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becoming creatures linked together in society, and so united to one another by nature, interest and public affections as men are, and who have so many common wants and cares, than, at stated times, to agree with one heart and voice, in addressing their desires to their common parent. Is it possible that there should be any impartial person who can avoid seeing and feeling a congruity and becomingness in this? Is there a more agreeable or noble sight, than that of a multitude of reasonable Beings engaged in offering up their joint homage and thanksgivings to the supreme ruler and benefactor?—The heathens appear to have been universally sensible of the obligation to public worship, and they had public forms of devotion on which they conscientiously attended. It is therefore surprizing that any who are not atheists should be able, with any peace or satisfaction, to allow themselves in the neglect of it. Such do really in effect withdraw themselves from the government of God,

reject his authority over them, deny his Providence, and declare they have no dependence upon him, or obligations to him.—But, besides; let it be considered what would be the consequence if all were to follow the example of such, and what would then be the state of mankind. Are not the public and stated forms of religion the evident means of keeping up order in the world, and of preserving in the minds of men some sense of morality and duty? Were these abolished, how many of the most powerful restraints from vice would be taken away? How soon should we sink into the savageness and barbarism of Indians and Hottentots? What multitudes would be lost in ignorance and guilt who now, under the influence of the public services of religion, are trained up in piety and goodness for future happiness *? Was there then nothing to engage

* “ And were it not for that sense of virtue which
“ is principally preserved, so far as it is preserved,
“ by national forms and habits of religion, men

engage persons to an attendance on public worship, besides the influence their example may have, this alone should be sufficient. And this shews us also how poor an excuse it is which some make when they say, that they know already all they are likely to hear from the pulpit; and that they can improve their time at home as well as at a place of public worship. For supposing this true of

“ would soon lose it all, run wild, prey upon one
 “ another, and do what else the worst of savages do.”
 See *Mr. Wollaston's Religion of Nature delineated*,
 Sect. V.

“ 'Tis plainly our duty to promote virtue and
 “ happiness among others. Our worshipping in so-
 “ ciety, our recounting thankfully God's benefits,
 “ our explaining his nature and perfections, our ex-
 “ pressing our admiration, esteem, gratitude and love,
 “ presents to the minds of others the proper mo-
 “ tives of like affections; and by a contagion, ob-
 “ servable in all our passions, naturally tends to raise
 “ them in others. Piety thus diffused in a society
 “ is the strongest restraint from evil, and adds new
 “ force to every social disposition, to every engage-
 “ ment to good offices.” *Dr. Hutcheson's System of*
Moral Philosophy, Vol. I. p. 217,

of the persons who talk thus, they ought to remember that it is not true of the bulk of mankind, who plainly need the aid of public instructions and admonitions. By absenting themselves, therefore, they contribute towards defeating the effect of what is calculated to promote the general good. They ought, besides, to consider that the end of attending on the public services of religion is not merely to receive instruction; but to worship God, to join as members of society in honouring and glorifying our common Lord by celebrating his praises together, and publicly acknowledging and supplicating him. This is what cannot be done at home. And there is no excuse or apology possible which can make the stated and voluntary omission of it otherwise than criminal and shameful. I cannot indeed reflect, without some indignation, on the conduct of those who allow themselves in this guilt, who discover so little reverence

reverence for the Deity, and regard to *decency* as to choose to be fauntering, feasting, or sleeping, while their fellow-creatures are engaged in attending to truths of infinite importance, and in offering up their acknowledgments to the Giver of all Good. How astonishing is it that this should be so common as it is ; that in a land of light and knowledge, in this Christian and protestant nation, the public worship of God should be more slighted, and the places designed for it more deserted than perhaps ever was known among civilized pagans? Nothing can have a much worse aspect on the welfare of the nation, or threaten it with greater evils. When a people become generally irreligious and impious, they become ungovernable, untractable, ready for every evil work, and ripe for misery and destruction. Religion, to say the least of it, is a most useful engine of state, and one of the best supports of public order. If we consider it only in this
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light, it is the proper object of public encouragement *; and the person who does not study to countenance it in his conduct, is so far a pernicious member of society.

Before I proceed to what further lies before me in this discourse, it comes in my way to take particular notice of two extremes

* By the public encouragement that should be given to religion, I do not mean the magistrate's interposing his authority to require compliance with any particular form of it, or to raise any one religious party above others. This would be going out of his province, and has hitherto been nothing but an encroachment on liberty, the shoaring up of error, the destruction of peace and harmony, and a violation of some of the most important rights of mankind. The way in which it is earnestly to be wished that all in public stations would encourage religion is by their *example*; by employing their influence to promote a conscientious regard to it in those forms of it which every one approves most; by leading the way in an attendance on its public services, and at the same time protecting alike all who are sincere in the profession of it.

extremes into which men are apt to fall; both common, and both fatal.—
The first, and that which it is most to my present purpose to mention, is the extreme into which those persons fall who pay no regard to piety or any of its duties, but profess great zeal for justice and gratitude and all social duties. As far as such practise social duties, and are truly faithful and benevolent, they cannot be too much honoured. But while they continue regardless of the Deity, and void of devotion, there is surely an essential defect in their characters. They want the living root; they want the best support, and a capital part of real goodness. The Deity ought to be the object of the first regard of a virtuous man. Love to him must be his prevailing affection; and he cannot but be anxious about making the proper acknowledgments of him in every capacity and relation of life. The exercises of devotion, I have shewn, are
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some of the noblest employments of our minds; most worthy of our rational powers; most perfective of our tempers and characters, and productive of the greatest delight. Can then a good man neglect these?—A good man without religion—A benevolent heart without love to the first benevolence.—A grateful mind without gratitude to its greatest benefactor.—A righteous life without prayer; without any act expressing suitable dispositions to the head and parent of the creation.—What palpable contradictions are these?

The other extreme I meant, and the worst by far of the two, is that into which those fall who are zealous for devotion, and exact in all positive and religious duties, but at the same time neglect social duties; make religion a cloak for wickedness; indulge censoriousness and uncharitableness; and will lie, trick, cheat, calumniate, undermine and prevaricate. These are indeed detestable.

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They know nothing of *true* devotion. They are, on many accounts, some of the vilest of mankind.—It should be our earnest study to discharge our *whole* duty, and to acquire an universally right temper and character. Nothing short of this can denominate us *truly* virtuous. No zeal for any one species of virtue or punctuality in some parts of duty, while others are neglected, can avail to our acceptance.

I have such an opinion of the importance of this, that I cannot help endeavouring here to engage attention to it by dwelling a little longer upon it, with a particular view to the two sorts of characters I have mentioned.—It is universally acknowledged, that a virtuous man is one who acts in conformity to his duty. We can have no other idea of a *virtuous* as distinguished from a *vicious* man. But let us consider what must be meant when this is said. Can the meaning be that a man
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is virtuous if he discharges a *part* of his duty only, or if he conforms to it in *more* instances than he transgresses it? If this is true, then, supposing our whole duty to be contained under any number of heads, as for instance, under temperance, gratitude, justice, benevolence, and piety, it will follow that a man who practises three of these will be a virtuous man, though he neglects the other two. If he is temperate, just, and pious, he is a virtuous man, though he wants gratitude and benevolence. Or if he is grateful, just and benevolent, he is a virtuous man, though he wants piety and temperance. On the contrary; he only will be a vicious man who possesses only two of these and wants the rest. Is it possible that any person can maintain such an absurdity?—When St. Paul assures us, that neither *fornicators*, nor *covetous men*, nor *drunkards*, nor *revilers*, nor *extortioners*, shall inherit the kingdom of God; did he mean that a *fornicator*, or a *covetous man*, or a *drunk-*

a drunkard, or an extortioner shall inherit the kingdom of God, provided he has but that one vice, and fulfils his duty in other instances? When eternal happiness is promised in the New Testament to all that *repent*; does it mean by *repentance*, not the forsaking of *all* sins, but all except that *one* which we love most?— If such doctrine is right; with what sort of characters will heaven be filled? Who is there that will not be saved?— But let no one thus deceive himself. If there is any regard due to some of the plainest dictates of reason and scripture, it is past doubt that no kind of *partial* goodness can be *true* goodness, and that he only is virtuous who endeavours faithfully to do his *whole* duty. The same truth will appear very evidently if we consider true goodness as consisting, not in having (what no Being can want) a regard to rectitude, but in being *governed* by it: For, certainly, it cannot *govern* where there is any one passion that *overpowers* it, or where there is
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any known guilt indulged, or *any known* obligation neglected in the stated course of life. Virtue, we should remember, is one undivided thing. It is the same in all the different parts of it; and an *habitual* disregard to it, in any one instance, is disregarding the whole, and betrays most manifestly a heart false to its interest, and void of a just affection for it.—But not to say more on this subject*.

I am sensible that I have been in danger of incurring the derision of some persons, by talking as I have done of family religion, of the pleasures of devotion, and of happiness in the Deity.—But this gives me no great concern. What I have been insisting upon is, in my opinion, of unspeakable importance. Those who have entertained contrary opinions are welcome to reject it. I can only wish

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* It is considered at large in *The Review of the principal Questions in Morals*, Chap. IX.

it was possible for me to convince them of a mistake which, I think, most unhappy and dangerous.——Others, by what has been said of devotion, private and public, as indispensably obligatory in itself, and the support and life of virtue, may be led to reflect very seriously on the state of their fellow-men. An ardent and at the same time a rational and unaffected devotion is one of the chief excellencies and glories we can possess. Nothing can make us appear more venerable, or bestow greater dignity on our characters. But where shall we find much of it? What numbers either pour contempt on devotion by principle, or neglect it through a criminal indolence, or disgrace it miserably by the tricks of superstition and the madness of enthusiasm? How unaccustomed to the best and most necessary exercises; how immersed in sense; how full of low cares; how inattentive to the Divine nature, and destitute of heavenly affections, are
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a great part of mankind?——When, indeed, I consider that piety and simplicity and purity and prevailing regard to every known obligation, which are necessary to constitute genuine goodness; and when I compare these with the carelessness and defects of numberless persons about me, and even of several who on many accounts are respectable and worthy, I cannot help feeling a painful concern and grief.—Would to God we were all more diligent, and more solicitous about acquiring true worth, and leaving nothing undone that reason and piety require.

S E C T. III.

Of the Manner in which Prayer ought to be performed.

I HAVE now finished the first part of my design in this Dissertation. What I had further in view was to represent the manner in which Prayer ought to be performed, in order to render it an acceptable and profitable service.

The first observation I shall make on this subject is, that Prayer ought to be performed with a mind properly prepared for it, and with fixed and composed thoughts. 'Tis an important and solemn work, and no pains can be too great to perform it in a becoming manner. Before we engage in it, 'tis proper to take time for serious recollection,

lection, for considering what we are going to do, and endeavouring to bring our minds to a right temper, and to impress them with suitable desires and sentiments. 'Tis not likely to be attended with great advantages when this is neglected, or when performed with minds full of worldly cares, ruffled by passion, or dissipated by pleasure.——But if it is thus proper to prepare ourselves for Prayer, it must be much more so to avoid all levity and absence of mind when actually engaged in it. For otherwise we shall not *pray* at all, but *mock* the Deity with unmeaning sounds. What can be more indecent, or express greater disrespect to the Most High, than to *draw nigh to him with our lips, while our hearts are far from him*; to pretend to address ourselves to him, and at the same time to suffer our thoughts to wander to the ends of the earth? Can we think he will hold them guiltless who thus *trifle* with him?——If we worship him at all, it ought to be with a guard

upon our attention, with an awe of him upon our minds, and an inward and sincere devotion. No bodily services or external pageantry and shew can please him. He is an omnipresent and perfect mind, who looks to our minds, and regards nothing but the acts of our minds.———'Tis true, the best men are liable to wanderings and distractions of mind in religious exercises. But some there are who are utterly inexcusable this way; who indulge themselves in inattention, and satisfy themselves with the careless repetition of a set of words and the mere *form* of worship. There is too much reason to believe, with respect to public Prayer in particular, that many attend it without any view at all to devotion or improvement, only because it is the custom, or for some less innocent reason; and that others, who perhaps are never absent from it, seldom *really* pray, but pass away the whole solemnity of worship in a heedless and trifling manner, with their thoughts employed
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on business, or intent on pleasure and folly. How can persons, who have any sense of the obligation and importance of Prayer, know themselves to be thus guilty, without severely reproaching themselves? Were it not for the influence which the examples of such might have, they would be almost as innocent if they were openly irreligious, and never appeared at any place of Divine worship.

2dly, We ought to pray with fervency of affection and desire. This must be of particular importance. It cannot be imagined, that any Prayers will be accepted, which are not emanations from a heart charged with good desires. The justest and best definition that can be given of devotion is, "that it is the
" affections corresponding to the Divine
" nature and character, expressing them-
" selves by their proper acts." As far, therefore, as these affections are either wanting or languid, devotion loses (I may say) its soul, and degenerates into

a worthless formality,———The proper dispositions for Prayer are gratitude and love to God; esteem and veneration for him; joy and confidence in his goodness; a sense of our dependence upon him as the absolute disposer of our lot; sorrow for the disorders of our hearts; humility and self-abasement; hatred of all sin; love to virtue as our chief good; and unfeigned benevolence to our fellow-creatures. For the same reason that we should possess these dispositions at all when we pray, they should be warm and active within us. It is not possible that we should then be too much concerned about reviving in ourselves the best sentiments, and raising to the utmost every pious affection. Our affections cannot be too intense when the Deity is the object of them. It is not possible for any Being to honour and love him enough.——We ought never to *think* of him without reverence. With what reverence then should we *pray* to him?—Our hearts indeed here require our
strictest

strictest care; and after all our labour we shall find them much too cold. Every virtuous man laments the weakness of his good affections, and the insensibility into which he is apt to sink with respect to the most interesting concerns. We are surrounded with alluring scenes and objects, which strongly solicit our attention and engage our passions, and which, if we are not watchful, will pursue us to the closet and the church, and there cause our minds to start aside, and damp and check them in their ascent to the Deity. In these circumstances it is encouraging to reflect, that God *remembers we are dust*, and will accept us, notwithstanding any infirmities which we endeavour faithfully to correct and remove.

That fervor in Prayer which I am now recommending, is so far from being inconsistent with the most free and perfect exercise of our rational powers, that it is its necessary effect. The juster
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views we have of our state, and the more plainly and truly we perceive the dependence of all things upon God, our own ignorance and defects, the importance of virtue and the evil of vice; the more our hearts must be impressed; the higher our affections must rise; and the more earnestly we shall pant after wisdom, direction and virtue.—There is, however, a fervor in religious exercise which is entirely mechanical, and the effect of nothing but pride and presumption. Against the influence of this we should take care to guard. All inward persuasions and transports of which we can give no good account; all sallies of *blind* zeal and affection we should suppress in ourselves as delusive and dangerous. Reason ought always to be the governing faculty, and the affections must not lead but follow. It will therefore be extremely wrong in any person, to judge of his religious character, by the heat and the extasies he may feel in devotion, without examining into the sources

sources of them.—Though it be in general true, that where the pure love of God and a spirit of genuine piety prevail, there will be an unspeakable ardor and delight in the exercises of devotion; and though one reason why many religious men do not feel more of this ardor and delight, is the imperfection of their characters; yet it should be remembered, that the only safe and infallible way of judging of ourselves is by our actions *. Every tree must be known by its fruits. The nature and degree of inward principles must be determined by

* It should be attended to, that the fervency in Prayer which I have in view, is an engagement and ardor of mind, consisting in the exercise of strong and lively sentiments of virtue and piety.—There are many good men of cold natural tempers, who may seldom be much moved with any thing in the common course of *worldly* affairs, and who therefore, in *religion*, may feel little of that passionate zeal and heat which others, of warm tempers but possibly far less respectable characters, may feel continually. The rule, therefore, given above should not be forgotten.

by their effects. He is the best man who is most remarkable for good works. He loves God most who is most like to him; who maintains in all he thinks and does the most strict regard to truth and right, and is the most useful and kind to his fellow-creatures. The true raptures in religion are those which flow from a conscience void of offence towards God and man, from a mind thoroughly reconciled to eternal righteousness, and a life shining with every Divine grace and virtue. The true spirit of devotion prevails most, where there is the most exemplariness of conversation and behaviour; the most regular discharge of all moral and religious duties; the most absolute resignation in all events to the Divine will; and the greatest degrees of meekness, patience, candour, charity, and self-government.

3dly, We ought to be constant in Prayer; or in the language of scripture *to pray always with all manner of prayer*
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and supplication in the spirit. So many and so great are the advantages of Prayer, and of such use is it towards guarding us against temptations and promoting our conformity to the Divine laws, that it ought to make one of the stated employments of our lives. So apt are we to lose our sense of the most important truths, to sink into a forgetfulness of our chief interest, and to grow indolent and careless amidst the avocations of business and pleasure, that we ought to be often having recourse to it, reviving by it good impressions on our minds, and putting ourselves into the proper posture for receiving grace and help from heaven. When this duty is neglected our best defence is lost, our progress in virtue slackens, and we must be in great danger of being carried away with the evil of the world.—As you value then all that is of consequence to a moral agent, you ought to be *frequent* in Prayer. If you have any ambition to grow in goodness,
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you will without doubt be diligent in using this best means of it. If you have a just sense of those mercies with which every moment of your existence is filled, you will be continually sending up your thanksgivings for them. If you know what satisfaction there is in true devotion, or have had any experience of its power to make you more happy and God-like, it will not be in your power to avoid employing yourself *often* in it.

There are no particular rules to be given on this head. Every one is here at liberty within certain limits, and must regulate himself as he finds most suitable to his temper and circumstances. I shall only say, that at least we ought to apply to the purposes of devotion some portion of time in every day. I should think that no religious person can well content himself with less than this.— Suppose, for instance, that we made it our practice to devote the greatest part of an hour every morning or evening to the

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duties of serious recollection, self-examination, and private Prayer; besides more time on Sundays, and at other extraordinary seasons.—Would there be any thing unreasonable in this? Would we not find ourselves abundantly recompensed for it, by the vigour and alacrity with which it would inspire us in the ways of righteousness, the heavenly turn it would give to our minds, and the constant watchfulness and attention to our characters which it would produce? Would we ever have reason to reflect, that we had thus taken too much pains to cultivate worthy affections, and to prepare for a better state? Would we repent of such a course when we came to die? Would not this and *more* than this be actually our practice, were we sensible enough of the infinite importance of religious virtue, or as much in earnest about it as the children of this world are about pleasure, gain and honour?

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The great advantages arising from such a method of devotion as that now proposed, have been attested to, from their own experience*, by some of the wisest and

* 'Tis related of Dr. *Boerhaave* (in his life by Dr. *Brown*) that he used to devote the first hour in every day to meditation and prayer; which, he used to say, prepared and strengthened him for the following employments of the day.—We are told of the excellent Mr. *Abernethy*, that it appears from his diary, that besides the daily exercises of the closet, he frequently shut himself up the whole day for the secret services of devotion. The reasons he gives for spending so much time in this way are in his own words these—“ I apply myself to these exercises, 1st, “ Because they are a noble employment of the “ mind, most worthy of its rational powers, tending “ to their highest perfection, and affording most “ solid joy.—2dly, In solemn transactions with “ God I may hope for such a confirmation in virtuous sentiments and dispositions, and such “ advantages over worldly lusts as may be of great “ use to me in future life; and this hope is justified by experience.—3dly, I would lay stricter “ obligations on myself to greater watchfulness and “ caution against the springs of error and perplexity “ and guilt, into which I have been formerly “ misled.”—See the *Account of Mr. Abernethy's Life* prefixed to the third Volume of his *Sermons*, p. 18.

and best men; and there are many now in the world, who would not exchange it, for the most prosperous course of irreligion that can be imagined.——It is necessary to observe here, that at the same time that we devote some part of every day to religious duties, there should always run through the rest of the day prevailing piety and goodness, and a spirit of love and humility. In other words; when not actually engaged in Prayer, we should keep ourselves as much as possible in a disposition for it, and speak and act on every occasion in such a manner, as to shew to all about us that we are often engaged in the best exercises. Happy beyond expression are those who thus *walk with God*; who study always to *live* in the same spirit that they *pray*.

I must add, that there are many incidental occasions in life, in which Prayer is peculiarly proper. Such are all occasions in which we have any weighty affairs under consideration, or are about

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engaging in any important undertakings. Nature and reason then strongly prompt us to seek the blessings of heaven upon our undertakings, and to implore direction and wisdom from that Being who governs all events. Plato, in a passage which has been often quoted *, says, that among the Greeks, no one of any discretion would ever undertake any thing without first invoking the Deity.—Times of trouble and affliction are likewise peculiarly proper for Prayer. There is no relief at such times like to that arising from pouring out our sorrows before our Maker, meditating upon them as what he sees and yet permits, and professing before him our hearty acceptance of them as his will.—When we have in any instance been drawn into guilt, it becomes us particularly to confess it in his presence; and to form, under his eye, solemn resolutions to endeavour in future time to be more careful.—Again; when we have received any extraordinary mercies or deliverances, it becomes us particularly to

* *In Timæo sub initio.*

to acknowledge them.——When we are tempted to any crime, we ought also to fly to Prayer as our very best security. There are few temptations which would not lose their force, if, when they come in our way, we would take time to set ourselves seriously to this duty. A prayer then offered up with attention would place us under the guardianship of heaven, and bring our minds in such a manner under the impressions of the motives to virtue, that it would be scarcely possible for us to deviate from it *.

4thly, In order to render our prayers successful, it is absolutely necessary that they should be accompanied with a holy life, and the diligent use of our own endeavours to acquire what we pray for. The efficacy of Prayer arises from

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* See Mr. Amory's Sermon on the *Advantage of Prayer*; and also his *Dialogue on Devotion*.—I would further beg leave here to recommend to every head of a family Mr. Pickard's three Discourses on the *Religious Government of a Family*.

its being the means and fruit of virtue, as well as from its being an immediate act of virtue, or a due acknowledgment of our dependence, and the performance of what is in itself fit to be performed. If therefore we separate from it virtuous resolution and right practice, we destroy its value, and make it much worse than what some think it must always be, “an insignificant form or ceremony.” *A wicked man's prayers are an abomination to the Lord. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, it is certain he will not hear us.* As a righteous life without Prayer implies a contradiction, Prayer being one essential part of right practice*: So Prayer without a righteous life is impiety and profaneness. What an insult, for instance, on the Deity would it be to ask of him the pardon of those offences which we design to

* Imo vero audacter affirmare possum eum qui sine sinceris ad deum precationibus virtutem sectatur, nunquam illam posse assequi, sed evanidam duntaxat aliquam illius umbram et inane imitamentum. *Dr. More's Enchirid. Ethicum.*

to repeat; to thank him for those benefits which we employ in rebellion against him; or to implore his blessing on any of our *unlawful* undertakings? What a mockery of him would it be to seek wisdom and happiness from him, and at the same time to neglect the appointed means for obtaining them; to pray not to be led into temptation, and at the same time to put ourselves into the way of it; or to bring with us into His presence any secret vice or favourite passion to which we are determined his authority shall not extend? — If then we would have our prayers successful, we must resolve to abandon all iniquity: They must be assisted by good works, and render us through our whole conduct more amiable and worthy.

I have before more than once touched upon what I am now observing; but it is of so much importance that it cannot be too often repeated, or too much inculcated. I must therefore be excused

for insisting here still further upon it,
—There are, certainly, no persons who deserve more of our detestation, than those who rest in the external services of religion, without endeavouring to accompany them with suitable actions in common life. It is melancholy to find in all religious societies so many of these hypocrites; men who shew no concern about going further than the *form of godliness*, and yet look upon themselves as the only favourites of heaven. They are constant in Prayer: But it does not mend their tempers or subdue their passions. They will not break the sabbath or omit a sacrament: But they will practise cunning and deceit, and speak evil of their neighbours. At church they are all seriousness and sanctity. In their families they are *tyrants*, and in their shops, *cheats*. Like the Pharisees of old *they tithe mint, anise and cummin*; but they *neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and fidelity* *. Their
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* Matt. xxiii. 23.

faith is uncharitableness, and their zeal pride and rancour.———Oh! wretched men! How can you avoid knowing that you are substituting the means for the end, and that the most profligate sinners will enter into the kingdom of heaven before you?———Offences of this kind will come. But woe be to those by whom they come. At the universal reckoning they will plead: “*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and eat and drank at thy table?*” Have we not offered up many “*a prayer, kept many a fast, and been zealous for thy cause?*” But we are assured that the answer they shall receive will be: *I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity* *.

It has before been shewn at large, that Prayer has the greatest tendency to make us in every respect better. In proportion to the degree of this tendency, must be the peculiar guilt of those in whom it does not take effect. Such are wicked

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* Matt. vii. 22.———Luke xiii. 25, 26, 27.

in opposition to stronger motives and obligations than others; and therefore shew greater depravity of character. They do unspeakable harm; and that spurious piety in which they trust is indeed worse than atheism.—Are you a religious man? Tremble at the thoughts of such guilt. Remember, that your principal work is to be done after you have been present at religious exercises. Shew to all about you that religion is lovely and happy, the inspirer of hope and joy, and the parent of all excellent qualities and noble actions.—You make conscience, I will suppose, of *statedly* retiring for serious recollection and prayer. Nothing can be more reasonable; nothing more important. But how do you act in the intermediate times? Do you leave your retirements with sweeter dispositions and firmer purposes to be and do all that is generous and worthy? Are you afterwards more humble and meek, more candid and sincere, more watchful over your life, and

and fuller of love and kindness to mankind?—This, without doubt, ought to be the effect of your devotions; and if they have not this effect; or if, on the contrary, they only render you more proud and disagreeable and less useful as a member of society, from a notion that they will be accepted as compensations for deficiencies in moral duties; as far as this is true, your prayers are a curse to you, and your religion is nothing but an execrable and destructive superstition.———I must not omit to observe,

5thly, That we ought to pray and give thanks in the name of Christ. Thus are we directed in the New Testament. John xvi. 23. *Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.* Ephes. v. 20. *Giving thanks always for all things to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Col. iii. 17. *Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.* The meaning of this is;
that

that we ought, in our religious services and all our actions, to maintain a regard to the relations in which Christ stands to us, and to consider ourselves as his followers.——Nothing can be more reasonable than this. The relations in which we stand to Christ are of the greatest importance. A regard to them, and a compliance with the duties resulting from them are a necessary part of goodness, and an indispensable condition of favour to all, as far as they have been made known. If Christ is indeed what the scriptures say, *the way, the truth and the life; the propitiation for our sins; our Deliverer from death, and the Saviour and Judge of the world*, it is fit that he should be recognized in these characters, and that our prayers should be offered up under a sense of them. It cannot be excusable to treat with neglect that name to which we owe our prospect of a blessed immortality, and at which *every knee is commanded to bow of things in heaven and things in earth*
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and things under the earth, to the glory of God the Father *. The inconceivable benefits which we receive by Christ's ministry, and the high station to which he is exalted for the good of mankind, afford us the noblest foundation for joy and hope, and the warmest admiration of Divine goodness. It would be wrong to forget these at any time; but it must be particularly so to forget them when engaged in the duties of devotion.

It may not be improper here to make a few observations on the *matter* and *composition* of Prayer, as the due regulation of these has a considerable tendency to render it a more profitable service.—With respect to the *matter* of Prayer; what requires most to be remembered is, that we ought never, except with great caution, to pray for any particular worldly advantages. The reason is obvious. We cannot say what advantages of this kind are fit for us, or
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* Phil. ii. 10, 11.

most conducive to our true interest. Those comforts, successes, and gratifications which we may be ready most eagerly to desire, may be entirely improper to be granted us; or, if granted us, might perhaps prove pernicious to us. And, on the contrary, those sufferings which we may be most apt to shrink from and to deprecate, may in reality be useful to us, and prove, on the whole, the greatest benefits.—— Virtue alone is what we certainly know to be good for us. This either implies in it, or will draw after it, all that is important to a reasonable Being. It is the true riches, the noblest treasure, the highest honour, and God's best and choicest gift. If we *have* this, it signifies nothing what we *want*. If we *want* this, it signifies nothing what we *have*. To the acquisition of this, therefore, and our improvement in it, ought all our prayers to be directed.—I hope it will not be said that this being placed in our own power, we have no reason
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for any applications to God for it, but ought to seek it entirely from ourselves. Such a sentiment cannot easily be entertained by any who have a due sense of their own frailties, or due apprehensions of the Deity, as the author of all good and the ruler of all events, *of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.*——Is any man truly virtuous? And has he no reason to praise God on this account? May he venture to declare that he owes it not in any way to God? Was it not in consequence of the Divine will and direction, that he was brought into those circumstances, and had those views of things laid before his mind, which have produced this happy effect? Is there no reason to think that there have been many good men in the world who, had their circumstances been in the least different from what they were, had one incident in their lives never happened, or had any smaller share of advantages been granted them, would have continued in the number

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ber of the careless and irreligious, and been lost for ever * ?

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* “ It is God who has made the mind of man
“ capable of perceiving motives, and of being
“ wrought upon by him. It is God who, in the
“ course of his Providence, has presented such a
“ train of motives to any one’s mind, as has engaged
“ him to practise all the virtues of a holy life. To
“ God, therefore, the praise of it is to be given.”

Dr. Leechman’s excellent Sermon on Prayer, p. 112.

Nothing can be more strong than what many heathen writers have said on this subject. Μεγας ο αγων, θειον το εργον, υπερ βασιλειας, υπερ ελευθεριας. Τε Θεε μεμνησο; εκεινον επικαλε βοηθον και παρασστην, ως της Διοσκουρες εν χειμωνι οι πλεοντες. Ποιος γαρ μεζων χειμων η ο εκ φαντασιων ισχυρων και εκκρεστικων τε λογε. Arriani Epict. Lib. II. Chap. 18. “ Great is the conflict,
“ divine the enterprize; for a kingdom, for liberty,
“ for tranquillity. Remember God. Call upon
“ him, for aid, as mariners do on Castor and Pollux
“ in a storm: For what greater storm is there than
“ that arising from violent passions clashing with
“ reason?” — Εκ της διανοιας εκβαλε λυπην, φοβον, επιθυμιαν, &c. Ταυτα δ’ εκ εστιν αλλως εκβαλειν ει μη προς μονον τον Θεον αποβλεποντα, εκεινω μονω προς πεπονηθατε, προς εκεινε προσταγμασι καδωσι ωμερο. “ Grief, fear, desire, &c. cannot be other-
“ wise

With respect to the *composition* of Prayer we may observe, that it ought to

“wise conquered than by looking to God alone,
 “and relying upon him.” Ib. Lib. II. Chap. 16.
 ———Again; Lib. IV. Chap. 4. Hast thou overcome thy lust or thy anger? Ποσω μειζων αιτια θυσιας η υπατεια, η υπαρχια. Ταυτα εκ σε αυτε γινεται και απο των Θεων. “How much greater
 “reason for a sacrifice is this than a consulship or
 “procuratorship? For this proceeds from thyself
 “and from God.”—Excellent also to the present purpose are the words of *Hierocles* in his Commentary on *Pythagoras’s* Golden Verses, verse 48. ουτε γαρ μονον προθυμεισθαι δει τα καλα, ως εφ εαυτοις οντα κατορθωσαι, και χωρις τε Θεου συνεργειας; ετε ψιλης της ευχης, &c. “We ought neither to pursue virtue,
 “as if it was in our own power to acquire it, without the help of God; nor to content ourselves
 “with mere prayer, without using our own endeavours to acquire what we pray for. This will be
 “either to make our virtue impious, or our prayers
 “unsuccessful. But impiety destroys the essence of
 “virtue; and inaction, the efficacy of prayer.”—Plato (in *Meno*) after he had endeavoured to prove that men have not virtue (perhaps he means chiefly political or public virtue) either from nature or instruction, concludes that it must be a Divine communication; and observes, that for this reason virtuous
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to be plain, serious and simple. Nothing can be more contemptible than
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men have been justly called *divine*. Εκ μὲν τούτων
ταύτων τὸ λογισμὸς, ὃ μὲνων, θεία μοῖρα ἡμῖν φαί-
νεται παραγιγνομένη ἢ ἀρῆς οἷς παραγιγνῆται. —

—To the same purpose speaks *Seneca*. *Bonus vir sine Deo nemo est*. An potest aliquis supra fortunam, nisi ab illo adjuvatus, exsurgere? Ille dat consilia magnifica et erecta. In unoquoque virorum bonorum (quis Deus incertum est) habitat Deus. Epist.

41. “No person is virtuous without God. How
“can any one rise above fortune, unless assisted by
“him. It is he gives great and noble designs.”—

Ita dico, Lucili, sacer intra nos spiritus habitat, bonorum malorumque nostrorum observator et custos. Hic prout a nobis tractatus est, ita nos ipse tractat. Ibid.

“There dwells within us a holy spirit who observes
“and watches our good and bad deeds, and who
“treats us as he is himself treated by us.”—*Multos et nostra civitas et Græcia tudit singulares viros; quorum neminem, nisi juvante Deo, talem fuisse credendum est.*

“Both our city and Greece, says Cicero, have produced many extraordinary men; none of whom,
“we ought to believe, could be what they
“were without God’s help.”—*Nemo vir magnus sine aliquo Divino afflatu unquam fuit.* De Nat.

Deorum, L. II. 66.—The subject of Maximus Tyrius’s 2d Dissertation is this question; “whether
“a good

an affected display of eloquence in this
duty, quaint phrases, studied antitheses,
vain

“ a good man is such in virtue of a Divine communi-
“ cation or not.” He maintains the affirmative, and
observes that God ought to be much more acknow-
ledged the giver of virtue than of arts and sciences,
or any temporal blessings; this being the best and
greatest good, and therefore what he must be most
ready to communicate. Men, he says on account
of the infirmities of their natures, need the influence
of an assisting and co-operating Deity to lead them to
virtue. Δεονταί συναγωνισέσθαι Θεοῦ καὶ συλληπτοῦρος
τῆς βοῆς καὶ χειραγωγίας. The life of Socrates,
he says, Diff. 30. was full of prayer. Ἦν ὁ βίος
Σωκράτους μέσος εὐχῆς. But the things he prayed
for were not riches and power, but a virtuous
mind, a quiet life, unblemished manners, and a
death full of hope, which are glorious gifts, and
such as the gods bestow. Ἀρετὴν ψυχῆς καὶ ησυχίαν
βίῃ καὶ ζοὴν ἀμεμπτόν καὶ εὐελπίην θανάτου
τὰ θαυμάσια δῶρα, τὰ θεοῖς δοτά.——“ As for
“ the gods, who has told thee that they cannot help
“ us in those things which they have put in our
“ own power? Whether it be so or not thou shalt
“ soon perceive, if thou wilt but try and pray.”
Marc. Antoni. L. IX. S. 40.——“ It is the duty of
“ all who are endowed with reason to ask all good
“ things of the gods; particularly the knowledge

vain tautologies, a redundancy of language, or impertinent excursions into matters

“ of themselves, for there is nothing greater that
 “ man can receive or God bestow.” Πάντα μὲν
 δεῖ ταγαθα τοῖς νοῦν ἔχοντάς αἰτεσθαι παρὰ τῶν-
 θεῶν; μαλιστα δὲ τῆς περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπισήμης, &c. Pluta.
 de Iside et Osiride initio.

Some of these passages, at the same time that they shew us what the best ancient philosophers thought of our dependence on the Deity for the acquisition of virtue, prove likewise that they thought very highly of the reasonableness and importance of prayer. But I shall beg leave to take occasion here to produce a few more passages in order to prove this.

“ To worship the gods and to pray to them,
 “ says *Plato*, is above all things fit, decent, beautiful
 “ and conducive to a happy life.” *Plat. de Leg. L. IV.*
 “ —In the 12th book of laws (Sub fine) he observes,
 “ that it is above all things proper, that none but such
 “ as understand and venerate and practice religion
 “ should be chosen magistrates, or be held in esteem
 “ on account of their virtue.” —In another of
 his Dialogues he observes to the same purpose, that
 it should not be thought, that there is any part of
 human virtue of greater weight, than religion or piety
 towards the Deity. *Epin. Sub fine.* —*Cicero* (in *Offic.*
Lib. I. Cap. ult.) places in the first rank of duties
 those we owe to God: And he observes that to destroy
 piety

matters of controversy and speculation,
as if our design was to shew the Deity
how

piety and religion is to introduce confusion into human life, and to subvert all social duties. *De Nat. L. I. n. 2.*—*Marcus Antoninus* asserts that the soul of man was made for godliness no less than for justice, and that the former is the proper ground and spring of the latter. *De rebus Suis. Lib. XI. S. 18.*

——The chief article of the unwritten law mentioned by *Socrates* (in *Xenoph. Mem. L. IV. C. IV. S. 19.*) is, that the gods ought to be worshipped. This, he says, is acknowledged every where; and received by all men as the first command. Πᾶσι πανσιν ἀνθρώποις πρῶτον νομιζέται, τὰς θεὰς σεβείν.

—Piety, says *Hierocles*, is the chief and the parent of all the virtues, and the contempt of piety the cause of all vice. In *Carm. Pythag. Vers. 1. 17.*—If you search the world, says *Plutarch*, you may find cities without walls, without letters, without kings, without money; but no one ever saw a city without a Deity, without a temple, or without prayers. *Plut. adversus Colotem.*——He concludes his treatise on superstition with observing, “that those who, “forsaking that piety which lies in the middle, run “into *irreligion* to avoid *superstition*, act like a person “who to avoid a wild beast, or a fire, should run “among pits and precipices.”——But there would be no end of quoting passages of this kind.

how finely we can talk, or how much we know.—I have now in my view *public* Prayer only. In *private* Prayer it is not to be supposed that any one can fall into these absurdities and indecencies. Here a truly devout heart will often find itself above the use of words. And in
general

Nothing is more certain than that religion has been held in the highest veneration among all civilized nations, and particularly among the wise Greeks and Romans. “ Our city, (says *Valerius Maximus*, of Rome. Lib. I. Cap. 1.) has always held every “ thing to be of inferior value to religion.”—It is impossible to think of this without being surprised at that disregard to religion which prevails at present in this kingdom. Has it indeed been discovered that the wisdom of all ages has been deceived in this instance, and that piety is no part of a good character? One would think that this must be the case; for it is not easy, on any other supposition, to account for that tranquillity and satisfaction with which, not merely the vulgar and illiterate, but many sensible and in other respects virtuous men, seem to live in the neglect of religious duties. It is plain, however, that the epithet *heathenish* has been very improperly applied to such persons, for it appears that Heathens thought and practised very differently.

general it will, perhaps, be right in private Prayer to suffer ourselves to be guided by our feelings and affections, and the present state of our circumstances, without tying ourselves down to any particular forms.

I might go on to give an account of the *means* of acquiring a true spirit of devotion, and of improving in it; and also to point out the *hindrances* of it.

—The principal helps to devotion are, the uninterrupted practice of it with sincerity; close and frequent meditation on our own wants, and on the Divine nature and attributes; the diligent discharge of every *other* duty of life; an ardent love of virtue and zeal to grow in it; and a heart lifted above sensible objects, and warmed with benevolent wishes and worthy sentiments.—

The chief enemies to devotion are, vanity and dissipation of mind; the love of pleasure; the deceitfulness of riches; gloomy notions of the Deity; inatten-

tion to religious truths; carelessness in cultivating good affections; and the indulgence of known guilt. A heart filled with the cares of life, and strongly attached to worldly pleasures, profits and honours, cannot ascend to heaven, or rise to clear views and a calm contemplation of Spiritual and Divine objects. The fire of lust, of ambition, or resentment will soon put out that of devotion. A soul conscious of demerit and deformity, burdened with a sense of guilt, and unable to resolve upon a present and thorough amendment must be averse to the Deity, and to all religious duties.—It is our duty to labour more and more to remove these hindrances of our religious improvement, to make use of every method in our power to cherish a devout temper, and to throw off all low cares, all irregular desires and perplexing passions, that our souls may turn themselves with greater ease and alacrity to the author of their existence and their only hap-

happiness.—But after all that we can do, innumerable imperfections must cleave to our best exercises in the present state. How reviving is the prospect of a better state, where we shall lose all our present infirmities, and nothing damp the extasies of our spirits; where we *shall see God face to face*, serve him without weariness, and be happy in him for ever?

To sum up and conclude the whole.—Wretched is the man who lives as without God in the world. Let all who would be happy remember what danger they must be in, not only from crimes they *commit*, but from any known duties which they *neglect*. Let them consider that according to the representation in *Matt. xxvth*, many will hereafter be condemned, not for being *actively vicious*, but for being *unprofitable*; not for *wasting* their talents, but for *not improving* them; not for any harm they have *done*, but for *good* they have *not done*. Of all the omissions

which we can be guilty of, one of the most unwarrantable and fatal is the omission of devotion. To want *piety* is to want the surest foundation of all excellent qualities, and to break that which our Lord calls, the *first and great commandment of the law* *. No worse blindness or calamity can happen to a rational creature.——What should we think of a person who should never address himself, in a way of acknowledgment and respect, to another person upon whom he was dependent, and to whom he owed all his happiness? Would not such a one shew a temper void of all gratitude and ingenuity? ——What an injury is it to our minds to refuse opening them to heavenly light and grace; to shut out of them the noblest sentiments; and to remain
regardless

* Matt. xxii. 37. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

regardless of the infinite Deity, though always soliciting our attention and working within and without us ; though surrounded with his glory, dependent every moment on his power, and maintained by his goodness ?——Can *he* be qualified for the worship of superior Beings in the mansions of the blessed, who, never worships here below ? Can *he* possess true goodness who forgets the fountain of all good, and omits a fundamental *part* and important *means* of goodness ?——Even the best men, with all the aid which they derive from religious duties, find it difficult to keep their minds in tolerable order, and to maintain themselves in tranquillity and purity ? What then must be the condition of those who pay no regard to these duties ? In what confusion must their minds lie ? Into what a desert must their characters run ? How unprepared must they be for sickness and death ?——We are often seeing that those who have neglected Prayer in life, fly to it with eagerness in death. They then send for

I ministers

ministers to pray with them, and expect, perhaps, that encouragement and comfort should be given them. But what comfort can be given them? He that now passes his days without Prayer, in vain will he fly to it when he comes to die. The happiness of another world is promised to a *holy life*, not to a *penitent death*. — Let us then, while in health, apply ourselves to the most necessary duties, and endeavour always to be so devout and diligent as we shall soon wish we had been. — In a little time this world will be no more to us; the curtain will drop between us and all mortal scenes; the solemn events which we are often hearing of, and which we are apt to see at a great distance, will overtake and amaze us; religion and eternity will appear to us in their just importance, and nothing will prove of any advantage to us except the good we now do, and the habits of virtue and piety which we possess. Let us take care to bear this in mind amidst all our engagements

ments and pursuits. Let us strive to acquire that spirit of true piety which will assimilate us to the Deity, and establish our souls in peace and resignation and a superiority to defiling passions. Let us do all in our power, by our example and influence, to revive the credit of religion, and to remove the prejudices which prevail against it. These prejudices, as far as they proceed from the dreadful effects of the corruptions of religion, are indeed in the highest degree unreasonable; for no one can be ignorant, that what is most useful and valuable becomes in all cases the most pernicious when corrupted. But the inexcusableness of these prejudices affords no reason for being more remiss in endeavouring to remove them. Did religion appear, in the tempers and lives of all who profess it, to be that joyful and divine thing which it really is, every objection to it would vanish, and it would soon force universal reverence and admiration.—But I feel myself in danger of being too tedious.

In the latter part of this dissertation I have endeavoured to shew in what manner we ought to pray. I have insisted particularly on our obligation to pray with minds duly prepared; with fervency, frequency and perseverance; with universal virtue in our lives; in the faithful use of the means for acquiring what we pray for, and as the followers of Jesus Christ, who through him look for a resurrection from death to the enjoyment of endless life and happiness. —How delightful and improving must such devotion be? How mighty its power to refine and exalt our souls? How unutterable the sweetness of a life thus spent? How noble an act of mind is a prayer thus offered up with simplicity and humility, with collected thoughts, a pure heart, assured hope, warm affections, and in the lively exercise of all worthy sentiments? *Does any man lack wisdom, or any thing good for him? Let him in this manner ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and it shall*

shall be given him *. Nothing can happen amiss to such a person. He has an almighty friend to confide in, who hears him at all times, is engaged in his defence, and will distinguish him eternally and infinitely from the irreligious and profane.

* James i. 5.

OF THE

Nothing can be
more common to see a person who has
nothing to do but to be idle, who
is engaged in
the business, and will suffer him
to be idle, and thus the
business is lost.

DISSERTATION III.

ON

The Reasons for expecting that
virtuous Men shall meet after
Death in a State of Happiness.

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DISSERTATION III.

ON

*The Reasons for expecting that virtuous
Men shall meet after Death in a State of
Happiness.*

NO person who ever makes any serious reflections, can avoid wishing earnestly to be satisfied, Whether there is a future state? And if there is, What expectations he ought to entertain with respect to it, and by what means his happiness in it must be secured? ~~—~~

There are many arguments which lead us to conclude, in answer to the first of these questions, that we are indeed designed for another state. And there are also many which at the same time prove, that the practice of virtue must be our best security in all events, and the most

Y

likely

likely method to secure happiness through every possible future period of our duration. True goodness is the image of the Deity in our souls; and it is not conceivable that it should not recommend us to his particular regard, or that those who practise it should not be always safest and happiest. On the supposition of a future world, nothing offers itself more unavoidably to our thoughts, than the notion, that it will be a state in which present inequalities will be set right, and a suitable distinction made between good and bad men.—It must however be owned, that this subject, as it appears to the eye of unassisted reason, is involved in much darkness. That in the future state all men shall receive an *adequate retribution*, we may in general know; but, had we nothing to guide us besides natural light, we could not go much further on any sure grounds, or give a satisfactory reply to several very interesting inquiries.

The

The consideration, particularly, of ourselves as *guilty creatures*, would raise doubts in our minds; and these doubts would not be lessened but increased by reflecting, that under the divine government, happiness is connected with virtue, and punishment with vice. The fact, that virtue will be rewarded, does not by any means determine what such virtue as ours may expect. The virtuous among mankind are to be considered as *penitent sinners*, and what peculiar treatment the cases of such may require, or how far repentance might avail to break the connection established by the divine laws between sin and misery, would not, I think, be clear to us.—Here then the aid of the christian revelation comes in most seasonably, and gives us the most agreeable information. It furnishes us with a certain proof from fact of a future state, and shews to our senses the *path of life* in the resurrection and ascension of *Jesus Christ*. It assures us, that repentance will be available to our

complete salvation; and that all virtuous men shall be rewarded with a blessed and glorious IMMORTALITY. At the same time, it teaches us to consider this as the effect, not of the ordinary laws of the divine government, but of a particular interposition in our favour, and a love to man in *Jesus Christ* which *passes knowledge*.

But it is not my present purpose to insist on these things. The reality of a future state, as it is discoverable by reason, and as it has been confirmed and explained by the christian revelation, must be now taken for granted. The design of this discourse is only to offer a few thoughts on one particular question relating to it, which, though not of the *highest*, is yet of *some* consequence. I mean the question, “How far we have
 “ reason to expect, that we shall here-
 “ after be restored to an acquaintance
 “ with one another, or again see and
 “ know one another.”

There are probably but few who have felt what it is to be deprived by death of persons they loved, whose thoughts have not been a good deal employed on this point. What, on such occasions, we must desire *chiefly* to know is, that our friends are happy; but it is unavoidable to inquire further concerning them with some anxiety, whether we are likely ever to see them again. It would be dismal to think of a departed friend or relative, that "He is gone from us for ever, that he exists no more to us." But virtuous men have no reason for any such apprehensions; and one of the unspeakable comforts attending the belief of a future state, arises from the hope it gives of having our friendships perpetuated, and being re-united in happier regions to those whom we have loved and honoured here.—I am well satisfied that this is a very rational hope; and in order to shew that it is so, I shall beg leave to offer the following observations.

Let it be considered first, what effect our future recollection of those who are now dear to us, is likely to have upon us.——We have great reason to believe, that all the scenes of this life will, in the future life, be presented to our memories, and that we shall then recover the greatest part, if not the whole of our present consciousness. The scriptures teach us this in a very striking manner.——It is not therefore to be doubted, but that we shall hereafter have a distinct remembrance of our virtuous friends and kindred; and this remembrance, one would think, must be attended with some revival of particular regard, and have a tendency to draw us to one another, as far as it will be possible or proper.——It will, I know, be objected to this, that our attachments to relations and friends are derived from instincts which have been planted in us to carry on the purposes of the present state, and which must cease intirely hereafter. This is, undoubtedly, in some degree

degree true. Every instinctive determination which respects only the exigencies of the present life, will cease with it. But does it follow from hence, that we are likely hereafter to be left as indifferent to those who are now our relations and friends, as if we had never known them? This would be a very wrong conclusion. The natures of things render it scarcely conceivable, that the recollection of those valuable persons with whom we now have connections, (of valuable parents, for example, who had the care of us in our first years, and have brought us up to virtue and happiness,) should not, in every future period of our duration, endear their memory to us, and give us a particular *preference* of them, and inclination to seek their society. Many of the distinctions, which we make in our regards between some and others, are derived from reason and necessity; and this seems to be the case in the present instance.——We are, perhaps, apt sometimes to carry our

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notions too far of the difference between what we now are, and what we shall be in the next stage of our being. It would be absurd to suppose, that we shall hereafter want all particular desires and propensities. Benevolence, curiosity, self-love, the desire of honour, and most of our more noble and generous affections, will not decrease, but grow as the perfection of our intellectual nature grows: And even our present social *instincts* may leave effects on our tempers which may produce an everlasting union of souls, and lay the foundation of sentiments and desires which shall never be lost.

But these observations, I am sensible, are not directly to the present purpose. What affords the plainest evidence on this subject, is the following consideration.—
There is great reason to believe that virtuous men, as beings of the same species who have begun existence in the same circumstances, and been trained up to virtue in the same state of trial and discipline,

discipline, will be hereafter placed in the same common mansions of felicity. It is groundless and unnatural to imagine, that after passing through this life, they will be removed to different worlds, or scattered into different regions of the universe. The language of the scriptures seems plainly and expressly to determine the contrary. They acquaint us, that mankind are to be raised from the dead *together*, and to be judged *together*; and that the righteous, after the general resurrection and judgment, are to be taken together to the same heavenly state, there to live and reign with Christ, and to share in his dignity and happiness. When, in the epistle to the Hebrews, (chap. xii. 22, 23, 24.) we are said, in consequence of the clear discoveries made by the gospel of a future state, to be, as it were, already come to the *city of the living God, to an innumerable company of Angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, and to the spirits of just men made perfect*:

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it is plainly implied, that we are to join the general assembly of just men and of angels in the realms of light, and to be fixed in the same mansions with them.

The state of future reward is frequently, in the New Testament, described under the notion of a city, that is, a community or society. It is likewise very often called a *kingdom*; the *kingdom of God*, and the *everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. The great end of Christ's coming into the world was to lay the foundation of this kingdom by saving men from the effects of guilt, delivering them from death, and uniting the virtuous part of them under one perfect and everlasting government in the heavens. It is said of the true disciples of Christ, that * *because he lives, they shall live also*; that they shall hereafter *appear with him in glory*; that he is now *entered for him into heaven as their forerunner*; that he is there *preparing*

* John.

ing a place for them, and that he will soon come again to take them to himself, that where he is, there they may be also, beholding his glory. This account is utterly inconsistent with the supposition, that those who shall partake of the future reward of virtue are to be dispersed into different parts of the universe, and scarcely leaves us any room to doubt on the present question. For, is it possible, that we should be happy hereafter in the same seats of joy, under the same perfect government, and as members of the same heavenly society, and yet remain strangers to one another? Shall we be together with Christ, and yet not with one another? Or shall we lose one another in *that multitude which cannot be numbered**, of those who have been rescued by him from destruction, and who will follow him to his everlasting kingdom? Being in the same happy state with our present virtuous friends and relatives, Will they not be accessible to us? And if accessible, shall we not fly to them, and

* Rev. vii. 9.

and mingle hearts and souls again?—I am very sensible, that a great deal of what the scriptures say of the future state is accommodated to our present imperfect ideas, and must not be understood too literally. But if, in the present instance, it means any thing, it must mean as much as implies what I am pleading for.

In order to give some further evidence on this point, it will not be amiss to desire that the following passages of scripture may be attended to.—The Thessalonians, a little before St. Paul wrote his first epistle to them, had, it seems, lost some of their friends by death. In these circumstances, he exhorts them not to *sorrow like others who had no hope*, because they might conclude certainly, from the death and resurrection of Jesus, that those who *had slept in him*, God *would hereafter bring with him*. He tells them *by the word of the Lord*, or, as from immediate revelation, that a period was
coming

coming when Christ would descend from heaven *with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God*; and when the friends they had lost should be raised from the dead, and, together with themselves, *should be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and to live for ever with him.* 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14, &c.—But what I have in view is more distinctly asserted in the 2d chapter of this epistle, verse 19. *For what is our hope, our joy, our crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming?*——It is most plainly implied in these words, that the apostle expected to see and know again his Thessalonian converts at Christ's second coming. The same remark may be made on his words in 2 Cor. iv. 14. *knowing, that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus, and present us with you.* And also in 2 Cor. i. 14. *As you have acknowledged us in part that we are your rejoicing, even so ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Having

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Having made these observations to shew, that we may with reason entertain the expectation of joining one another hereafter ; I shall now beg leave to give myself free scope in imagining and representing the happiness with which it will be attended.—It is scarcely possible for any person not to look upon this, as one most agreeable circumstance in the future state of felicity. It has a tendency to render the contemplation of another world much more delightful. The hope of it rises up unavoidably in our minds, and has generally, if not always *, accompanied the belief of a future existence. Nor does there appear the least reason why we should hesitate here a moment, or refuse falling in readily with the natural and common apprehensions

* *O præclarum diem, cum ad illud divinum animorum concilium cætumque proficiscar ; cumque ex hac turba et colluvione discedam ! Proficiscar enim non ad eos solum viros de quibus ante dixi, sed etiam ad catonem meum ; quo nemo vir melior natus est, nemo pietate præstantior, &c. Cic. de Senectute.*

ensions of mankind. Without dwelling therefore any longer on the evidence for this point, let us recollect some of the particular circumstances which will contribute towards rendering the future junction of virtuous men joyful.

One of these circumstances will be the remembrance of their present connections with one another. For *men* to meet *men* in the heavenly society; for beings to join one another hereafter, who have begun their existence on the same planet, felt the same fears, and undergone the same discipline, must be the cause of pleasure. What then will it be for *friends* to meet *friends*, and *kindred* to meet *kindred*? What will it be, after obtaining a complete conquest over death, to be restored to those who are now dear to us as our own souls, and to whose example and instructions we are, perhaps, indebted for the highest blessings? With what delight will the pious parent meet his children, the husband the wife, and the

I master

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master his family? How will many good men, now of opposite sentiments, rejoice to see one another in bliss, and to find those errors corrected and those silly prejudices removed, which here keep them at a distance from one another? How will the faithful clergyman rejoice with those of his flock who have profited by his labours, and whom he has been the means of reclaiming from vice, or improving in goodness? What congratulations and mutual welcomings, may we suppose, will then take place between all virtuous friends? How agreeable will it be to review together the conversations which they have with one another in this state of darkness, and to recollect and compare the scenes they now pass through, the doubts that now perplex them, the different parts they now act, and the different temptations and trials with which they struggle? Are such views and reflections all visionary? Surely they are not. If there is indeed to be that future junction of the worthy among
mankind,

mankind, which I have pleaded for, they are sufficiently warranted, and must offer themselves to every considerate mind.

Another circumstance which will contribute to the joy we shall have in meeting one another hereafter, will be our reflection on the common danger we shall have escaped. We are told in the plainest terms by the mouth of divine wisdom, that all who do wickedly shall be doomed to *that everlasting fire* *
which

* Matth. xxv. 41. *Then shall he say to them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* It has been observed as remarkable, in the passage from whence these words are taken, that whereas the *kingdom* into which the righteous are to be advanced, is said to have been prepared for them from before the foundation of the world; the *everlasting fire*, on the contrary, into which the wicked are to be consigned, is said to have been prepared, not for them, but for the *devil and his angels*.——This seems to intimate to us that the devil and his angels were the first transgressors, who have been the means of involving mankind in guilt and distress.

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which was prepared for the devil and his
angels; and that broad is the way, and wide
the

I cannot forbear adding, with respect to the representation which the scriptures often make of the future state of punishment, as an *unquenchable and everlasting fire* into which the wicked are to be cast; that probably the reasons of it may be,—1st, The propriety of an inextinguishable fire, which consumes whatever is thrown into it, to represent, in a manner striking to the imagination, the future everlasting rejection and extermination of all that work iniquity. —2^{dly}, Learned men have observed, that there is in this representation an allusion to the continual fires in the valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem, where, in idolatrous times, innumerable children had been burnt alive to Moloch; and where, in the times of our Saviour, there was a fire always burning to consume the filth of the city and the carcases of animals. This valley was considered by the Jews, for this reason, as a place so unclean and horrible, that it was natural to make use of it as an emblem of the state of future punishment. It is well known, that the original words rendered by the translators of the New Testament, *Hell-fire*, are the fire of *Gehenna*, or the fire of the valley of *Hinnom*. It was, therefore, from this valley, that the regions of punishment came to be called by the ancient Jews *Gehenna*, the sign or emblem being made to stand for that which it was supposed to resemble.

the gate that leadeth to destruction, and that many there be who go in thereat. Every person, therefore, who shall hereafter attain to happiness, will be one escaped from great danger. And can it be imagined, that the remembrance of this will have no tendency to enhance the satisfaction attending the future junction of good men? Will it not be agreeable to see that, amidst the dismal wreck, our friends have been preserved; and that they are safe landed, after being tossed on the sea of this world, and running numberless risks of being cast away? Will it not give us the highest pleasure to meet among the blessed, those persons for whom, perhaps, we have often sighed and trembled; or to find, that instead of being numbered among the lost and miserable, our earnest wishes for them have been answered, that they have acquitted themselves well in life, and *chosen that good part which will never be taken from them?*

Thirdly, It may be proper, on this occasion, to think of the place where we shall hereafter join our virtuous friends. We shall meet them in the realms of light; *in that city* which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* We shall see them again in those *new heavens and that new ‡ earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, into which nothing that defileth, or that loveth or maketh a lie, shall be admitted†; where all tears will be wiped away from our eyes, and pain and death and sorrow shall be known no more ||*; where nature will shew us its most glorious face, and order, peace and love reign in full perfection for ever.

But one of the particulars that most requires our notice here is, that our friends will then have lost their present weaknesses. They will not then be such frail
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and

* Heb. xi. 10.

† Rev. xxi. 27.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 13.

|| Rev. xxi. 4.

and helpless beings as we now see them. They will not be liable to be insnared by temptations, or ruffled by unreasonable passions. They will not be hasty in their judgments, capricious in their tempers, or narrow in their opinions. Every wrong bias will be taken from their wills, and the imperfections, which now render them less amiable, will be removed. Our hearts shall never more ache for their troubles, or feel anguish on their account. They will be past all storms, cured of all follies, and eased of all pains. They will appear in finished dignity and honour, after the education and discipline of this world, and be endowed with every excellence which we can wish them to have.— What pleasure will it give to meet them in these circumstances? How delightful will be our intercourse with them when they, together with ourselves, shall be thus changed and improved?

Once more. In the future world, there will be no such painful separations from

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our friends as we now suffer.——It can scarcely be said that we have in this life, more than just time enough to begin friendships, and to feel the pangs of sorrow that attend the dissolution of them. But, in the heavenly state, we shall feel no sorrows of this kind. Our friends will be *immortal*. Our happiness in them will be liable to no abatements from the sad apprehension of being soon parted from them, and seeing them sink under decay and sickness. We shall never be witnesses to any such shocking scenes as their expiring agonies. The cruel hand of death will not be able there to reach them, and to tear them from our embraces *. They will flourish in eternal health

* “ Who would not (says Socrates in his apology) part with a great deal to purchase a meeting
 “ with *Orpheus, Hesiod, Homer, &c.* ? If it be true
 “ that this is to be the consequence of death, I would
 “ even be glad to die often. —— What pleasure will
 “ it give to live with *Palamedes* and others who suffered unjustly, and to compare my fate with
 “ theirs ?

health and vigour, and be with us *for ever with the Lord.*——Such are the circumstances that, we may imagine, will contribute to the joy attending the future junction of virtuous men in the heavenly state, I cannot help adding the following reflexions.

First, What I have been saying has a tendency to increase our satisfaction in our friends. The prospect, in general, of a future state, must have a most friendly influence on our present enjoyments. What, indeed, is human life without such a prospect? What darkness rests upon it, when we consider it as no more than a passing shadow, *which appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away*; or, as a short period of tumultuous bus-

Z 4 tle

“ theirs? What an inconceivable happiness will it
“ be to converse, in another world, with *Sisyphus*,
“ *Ulysses*, &c. especially, as those who inhabit that
“ world shall die no more?——Και ηδη τον λαιπον
χρονον αθανατοι εισιν; ειπερ γε τα λεγομενα αληθη εστιν.
Socr. Apol. apud Plat.

tle and uncertain happiness diminished by many vexations, with an infinite blank before and behind it? Such a view of life deprives its pleasures of their relish. It is enough to chill all our thoughts, and to break every spring of noble action within us.—But if, in reality, this life is only an *introduction* to a better life, or the feeble *infancy* of an existence that shall never end, it appears with unspeakable dignity; it has an infinitely important end and meaning; all its enjoyments receive an additional relish, and the face of nature will shine with greater beauty and lustre.—In particular, the consideration of the circumstance relating to our future existence on which I have been insisting, will communicate new joy to all our present *friendships*.—The reflexion on our friends as heirs with us of the same blessed immortality, as persons whom we shall meet in the regions of heavenly bliss, and live with for ever, must cheer our minds in all our inter-

intercourse with them, and cause us to look upon them with the highest affection and delight. But, to consider them as only beings of a day, who are to perish in death we know not how soon; How uncomfortable is this? What a damp must it throw over our friendships? How difficult must it be for persons, who have any tender feelings, to think, without distress, of agreeable connexions which they see will end in a speedy and final separation; or, of valuable friends, all whose valuable qualities are, in a little while, to be wholly extinguished, and whom they are just going to lose forever? The more agreeable the connexions are, the more distress must such apprehensions create; and the more valuable our friends, the greater reason will there be for pain.—But, suppose what has been asserted in this discourse; suppose, that our present connexions are to be renewed hereafter, that we are again to see those valuable persons who are gone before us from hence, or, that the friend-

friendships which now take place between worthy men, are only the beginnings of an union of minds, that will be continued and perfected in the heavens: Suppose this, I say, and all will be triumph. We shall have abundant encouragement to cultivate friendship. The view of death will have a tendency to increase, rather than damp the pleasures attending it. The addition of a good friend or relative will be the addition of one, who will share with us in the joys of immortality, who will enter with us into the city of the *living God*, and be our everlasting companion in glory.

It is natural to remark further on this occasion, how important it is that we cultivate only virtuous friendships. Cicero has observed, with the highest reason, that all friendship ought to be founded in virtue. There is certainly nothing else that can make it safe, lasting and happy. It is its cement, life, joy and crown. There is no other permanent founda-

foundation of love, or bond of union between reasonable beings. — But there is nothing much better fitted to shew the importance of virtue in friendship, than the subject now under our consideration. How shocking must it be to believe, that our dearest intimate is one whom we cannot expect to see hereafter in bliss, one who wants the love of the Deity, and who is hastening fast to everlasting punishment? How can any person think of having in his bosom an enemy to the order of the world, and a child of perdition and ruin? With what pain must an attentive person look upon such a friend, and what concern must he feel for him? On this account, were irreligious friends to allow themselves time enough for reflexion, they would necessarily be the causes of the greatest trouble to one another. Did they duly attend to their own circumstances, the danger they are in, the precariousness of life, and the nearness of the time when they shall be separated, never again to meet, except in
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that world where joy is never known, and hope never comes; did they, I say, properly attend to these things, they would surely be incapable of bearing one another; their love would be turned into anguish, and their friendship into horror. Let us then avoid, as much as we well can, becoming intimately connected with any, except the virtuous and worthy. Let us resolve to cultivate friendship only with those whom we may hope to be happy with *for ever*.

In the next place. It is a very obvious observation on the present subject, that it affords the best consolation in a time of grief for the death of friends. It is, I think very credible that death is an event, for which, such creatures as we are might not at first be designed. It looks like a break in our existence, attended with such circumstances as may well incline us to believe, that it is a *calamity* in which we have been involved, rather than a *method of transition* from one state
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of existence to another, originally appointed by our Creator and common under his government. This, the scriptures declare plainly to be the real fact: But then, it should be remembered, that the same scriptures inform us further, that we have a great deliverer, who came into the world, *that we might have * life*; and who, *by death has destroyed death and him who had the power of death, and obtained for us everlasting redemption.*

The dark and dreary grave, therefore, has now nothing in it that should make it appear terrible. To virtuous men, it is no more than a bed of rest till the morning of a joyful resurrection. We have, as christians, something better to support us under the anguish produced by the death of friends, than the cold alternative of the ancient philosophers, that either they are happy, or returned to the state they were in before they were born. We may exult in the expectation of finding them again,
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* John x. 10—Heb. ii. 14.—ix. 12.

and renewing our friendship with them in a better country. The worst that death can do, is to cause a short interruption in our intercourse with them; or to remove them from our sight for a moment: We shall soon follow them, be raised up with them to a new life, and take possession with them of an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away**. Such are the hopes which the blessed gospel gives; and well may they elevate our minds above these scenes of mortality, dry up our tears in every season of sorrow, and inspire us always *with joy unspeakable and full of glory*†. The whole effect which the inroads made by death among our friends, should have upon us, is to render us more diligent in religious virtue, and to quicken us to greater zeal in endeavouring to secure a meeting with them and with all worthy men hereafter. It should belong only to those, whose regards are confined to this world and who have no hope, to be inconsolable on such occasions.

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* 1 Peter i. 3, 4.

† 1 Peter i. 8.

Once more: I would observe, that the expectation which virtuous friends have of being completely happy together hereafter, furnishes them with a very important direction for regulating their present behaviour to one another. They should maintain in their whole deportment, that purity and dignity which become so high an expectation. They should endeavour, by their examples and admonitions, to excite in one another an earnest ardor to excel in every worthy quality, and watch continually over one another, lest, through the indulgence of any failures, they should lose future bliss, and come to be eternally separated from one another. Their views ought to be directed always to the heavenly state, and their whole concern should be so to live and converse together, as to secure a joyful meeting there.

The pleasures of society and friendship are some of the greatest we are capable of. It is not credible, that there is any created intelligence that enjoys a happiness which
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is independent of all social correspondencies and connexions. A state wholly solitary must want many of the principal sources of bliss. It appears dark and desolate, and cannot admit of the exertion of some of the noblest powers of reasonable beings. Friendship therefore, in all probability, is everlasting and universal in the rational creation, and will make a part of our happiness in every future period of our existence. The consideration of this has a tendency to raise our ideas of its value, and should engage us to be anxious about so acting in this relation now, and so improving its blessings, as that we may go from hence properly qualified for the more noble and exalted friendships of another world.—How noble and exalted these will be, it cannot enter into our hearts to conceive. It is impossible to look forwards to them with lively faith and attention, without feeling an alacrity and elevation of mind, not to be produced by any other cause. Let us, before we dismiss this subject, fix our thoughts here a moment,

moment, and recollect some of the observations which have been made.

It gives us, in the present life, a pleasure of the highest kind, to converse with wise and worthy men amidst all our present imperfections, and notwithstanding the certain prospect of being in a little while parted by death. What then will it be to join the general assembly of the great and good in the heavens; to be restored there to those who are now the desire of our eyes and the joy of our hearts; to converse with them when freed from every weakness and adorned with every amiable quality, and to make a part of the glorious company of Christ's faithful followers at his second coming? What will it be, not only to have our present friendships thus perpetuated, but to commence new ones with superior beings; to live and reign with the Saviour of sinful mortals, and to be forever improving, with all the virtuous part of the creation, under the eye and care of the Almighty?

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We are now frail, feeble, ignorant and helpless. We think, we speak and act like children; but, in a little time, we shall be advanced to a more perfect state, and receive our complete consummation in soul and body in everlasting glory. Soon the darkness of this world will vanish, every weight will be removed from our aspiring minds, our highest faculties gain full scope for exertion, and unclouded endless day dawn upon us. We shall be brought to *the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to God the judge of all.*

———We have latent powers which it may be the business of eternity to evolve. We are capable of an infinite variety of agreeable perceptions and sensations, which are now as incomprehensible to us, as the enjoyments of a grown man are to an infant in the womb. Our present existence is but the first step of an ascent in dignity and bliss, which will never come to an end.—
How amazing and extatick this prospect?

What shall we some time or other be?—

But let us take care to remember the truth, which, in this discourse, I have all along kept in sight. Let us not forget, that none but persons of righteous lives and characters have reason to rejoice in these views.

—The workers of iniquity will not *rise* but *sink*. They will be driven from the society of virtuous beings. They will lose infinite happiness, and be cast away for ever. They are nuisances in the creation, and unfit to be preserved; or, according to our Lord's representation, *the tares among the wheat, and when the time of harvest shall come, he will say to his reapers, Gather together, first the tares, and bind them in bundles, and burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn* *.—Would you then make sure of the happiness I have been representing? Would you when every earthly connexion is broken, obtain admission into a better world, and an union with those you love in the habitations of the just? Would you be able, hereafter,

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* Matt. xiii. 30.

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to join your voice to the voices of millions, who, after the long silence of the grave, will break forth into St. Paul's song of triumph, *O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Blessed be God who giveth us the victory thro' Jesus Christ?* Would you rise to a place on *Christ's throne* *; or, see the time when you shall look down upon arch-angels?—Then avoid vice. Practise true religion. Strive to get above defiling passions, and to grow in every excellent disposition? —On this, all depends. This is the only preparation for bliss, and the only way to favour under the divine government. All anxiety, except about this, every human being will soon know to be folly unspeakable.——Remember that if there is such a state of future existence as has been described, there is nothing worth a single thought, compared with making provision for it; and that, conscious of your own dignity, it becomes you to look continually above every

* Rev. iii. 21.

every thing mortal, and to spurn with disdain at those pleasures, profits and honours, on which the *children of this world* set their hearts.—*Blessed are they who keep the commandments of God, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city*.*—*He that overcometh shall inherit all things. But the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murtherers, and whoremongers, and forcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.*

* Rev. xxii. 14. xxi. 7, 8.

DISSERTATION IV.

ON

The Importance of Christianity,
The Nature of Historical Evidence,

AND

MIRACLES.

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DISSEMINATION IN

OF

The Importance of Christianity

The Nature of Historical Evidence

AND

MIRACLES

By

DISSERTATION IV.

ON

The Importance of Christianity,
the Nature of Historical Evidence,
and Miracles.

SECTION I.

*Introductory Observations, relating to the
Importance of Christianity, its Evidences,
and the Objections which have been made
to it.*

IT is not possible, that any information should be so important, as that which we have in the sacred writings. The discoveries lately made in the system of the material world are justly thought of with admiration. They bestow, indeed,

deed, new lustre and dignity on human nature. But they are of no consequence and deserve no regard, compared with the discoveries contained in the Bible, supposing it intitled to our faith. We are here made acquainted with several facts in the scheme of the moral world, and the history of Providence, which are not only *wonderful*, but *interesting* in the highest degree.

There is nothing in all nature, about which we have so much reason to wish for information, as *death*, the relentless destroyer which reduces to the dust every human being, and which, in all ages, has held the world in bondage, and given birth to numberless woes and sorrows. Concerning this, the scriptures reveal to us many particulars of the utmost importance, which we could not otherwise have known. They acquaint us, that it was not an *original part* of the divine scheme, but a *calamity* in which our race has been involved, in consequence of certain

tain connexions which took place under the divine government. They inform us of the causes which introduced it, and of a stupendous dispensation of providence which it has occasioned. They discover to us that great *Messiah*, by whom God made this world, and who came down from heaven to deliver it from distress; who is now the Lord of men and angels, and who, hereafter, will appear in glory to abolish death, to judge mankind in righteousness, to execute justice on the wicked, and to establish an *everlasting kingdom*, in which all the virtuous and worthy shall meet and be completely and unchangeably happy.

I make these observations in order to shew how much it concerns us to study the sacred records, and to inquire into the evidences of their divine original. It is not easy to conceive of a higher obligation, that such creatures as we are can be under. There is scarcely a principle in our natures which does not induce us
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to this powerfully. In particular; as the scriptures inform us of the chief revolutions through which this world *has* past, and *will* pass, the principle of *curiosity* leads us to it. As they profess to teach us God's will, and to give an account of a revelation from heaven, all the principles of *piety* lead us to it. But, more especially, we are led to it by the whole force of the principle of *self-love*. For, if the Bible is true, it settles the terms of salvation, and contains the *words of eternal life*; and, consequently, the folly of carelessly rejecting it will be infinitely worse, than the folly would be of carelessly throwing aside a deed, which, if valid, proved our title to a large estate.

I think, with great pleasure, that the subject to which I refer has lately engaged much attention, and undergone a strict scrutiny. It is to be wished, that the attention to it may continue, and that all the learned and inquisitive would unite their efforts towards giving it the
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most thorough discussion, allowing every objection its full weight and a fair hearing, and never concealing any thing that may have a tendency to throw light on a controversy of such moment. The opposition hitherto made to christianity, has, I think, done it the greatest service. It has been the means of causing it to be better understood, of shewing, in a clearer light, on what foundation of evidence it stands, and of removing from it many incumbrances and adulterations, which, for many ages, had miserably disguised and debased it. We may reasonably hope for more and more of these good effects, the more unbelievers go on to exert their strength *. Let no one then put himself to the least pain on account of any of their writings. Much less, let anyone think of calling in the aid of civil power to answer them †.

Detested

* This is well represented in the second of Dr. Gerard's *Dissertations on Subjects relating to the Genius and Evidences of Christianity*.

† We have lately seen a cruel instance of this in the prosecution, pillorying and confinement to

Bridewell

Detested be the principles which have occasioned this. Let rather unbelievers be encouraged to produce their strongest objections. If christianity is of God, we may be sure that it will bear any trial, and in the end prevail.—The civil magistrate ought not to interpose in the defence of truth, till it has appeared that he is a competent judge of truth. This, certainly, he is not. On the contrary; universal experience has, hitherto, proved him one of its worst

Bridewell of a poor puny infidel, worn out with age, who was utterly incapable of doing any cause the least good or harm.—It is a bad excuse to say, that it was not *infidelity*, but *indecentcy and scurrility* that were punished in this instance. For, this is to punish for the circumstances in a publication, which render it so much the less likely to produce any effect. Besides, who shall have the power of determining whether a book against an established opinion is writ *decently*, in order to give a right of punishing? There are no hands in which such a power can be lodged, without the utmost danger to what, as reasonable beings, we ought most to value. A zealot in a *popish* country, cannot well wish for any greater power. God grant it may never be again allowed to any zealots in our own.

worst enemies. Nothing can be more disgraceful to the christian religion than to suppose, that it needs *such* assistance. Were this true, it would, by no means, be worth defending.

Among the objections which have been made to christianity, there are some that contain real difficulties; and which a candid defender of christianity, instead of pretending intirely to remove, should allow to weigh as far as they can go against the evidence. The proof of christianity does not consist of a clear sum of arguments, without any thing to be opposed to them. But it is the *overbalance* of evidence that remains after every reasonable deduction is made on account of difficulties. This is the case with respect to almost every point that can employ our thoughts; and those who believe, that there is any question which they can clear of every difficulty, may be sure, that they are either very unfair or very superficial in their inquiries.—But, at the same time that I acknowledge this, I must say, with
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respect to christianity, that many of the chief objections to it have received a full answer, and are indeed the effects of partial views and very wrong notions.—I will beg leave just to mention a few instances of this.

It has been said, that if christianity came from God, it would have been taught the world with such clearness and precision, as not to leave room for doubts and disputes.—It is wonderful to me, that any person can mention this who believes the doctrines of natural religion, or who has read the defences of christianity. Has the author of nature given us *reason* in this manner, or even the information we derive from our senses? Is it possible, while we continue such creatures as we are, that any instruction should be so clear as to preclude disputes? Supposing the Deity to grant us supernatural light, are we judges what degree of it he ought to give, or in what particular manner it ought to be communicated?

Again;

Again: The animosities, persecutions and bloodshed which the christian religion has occasioned, have been urged as objections to it.—This, likewise, certainly should not be mentioned, till it can be shewn, that there is one benefit or blessing enjoyed by mankind, which has not been the occasion of evils. How easy would it be to reckon up many dreadful calamities, which owe their existence to knowledge, to liberty, to natural religion, and to civil government? How obvious is it, that what is in its nature most useful and excellent, will, for this very reason, become most hurtful and pernicious when misapplied or abused? Christianity forbid every evil work. Its spirit is the spirit of forbearance, meekness, and benevolence. Were it to prevail in its genuine purity, and to be universally practised, peace and joy would reign every where. Uncharitableness, priest-craft, contention and persecution, are evils which have taken place among its professors, in direct opposition to its scope and design. Is it not

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then hard that it should be made responsible for these? Has it not a right to be judged of by its genius and tendencies, rather than by any mischief which blindness and bigotry and the love of domination have done in the christian church?—For my own part, when I contemplate the horrid scenes which ecclesiastical history presents our view, instead of feeling disgust with christianity, I am struck with the divine foresight discovered by its founder, when he said, *I am not come to send peace on earth, but a sword*; and led to a firmer faith, arising from a reflexion on the warning given in the scriptures, that an apostacy would come, and a savage power appear which should defile God's sanctuary, trample on truth and liberty, and make itself drunk with the blood of saints and martyrs.

Further: The offence which has been given to unbelievers, by the positive institutions of christianity, is in my opinion manifestly groundless. There is not a
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more striking recommendation of christianity than its *simplicity*, or, its freeing religion, so much as it does, from the incumbrance of rites and ceremonies. Other religions are loaded with these, and have a tendency to hurt the interest of morality, by turning the attention of men from it, and leading them to seek the favour of God more by an exactness in outward forms, than by a virtuous temper and practice. Christianity condemns, in the strongest language, this dangerous superstition, assuring us, that those who fall into it shall *receive the greater damnation*; that *God desires mercy and not sacrifice*; and, that true religion consists, not in any ritual services, but in *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*. To censure it, therefore, notwithstanding this, merely because it enjoins two such easy and simple rites as *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*, is doing it great injustice, and overlooking one of its most peculiar and distinguishing excellencies.

But, there is no objection about which more has been said, than that taken from the want of universality in the christian revelation. This also is an objection which there is great reason to expect, that unbelievers should drop. Such effectual answers have been given to it, that, indeed, it is some trial of patience to sensible christians, to hear it still so much insisted on, and so often repeated. Those who are influenced by it go upon a notion that they could not entertain, were they not too partial and careless in their inquiries. They suppose, that if the christian revelation is true, there must have been a necessity of it, in order to supply mankind with *sufficient means* for securing God's favour, and attaining to future happiness. But such a notion is intirely groundless. Acting up faithfully to the light we enjoy, is the only condition of our happiness. *Glory, honour, and peace, shall be upon every one that worketh good, be he Jew or Gentile* *. *God is no respecter of persons,* (St. Peter

* Rom. ii. 10.— Acts x. 34, 35.

(*St. Peter* tells us) *but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.*—There are two points of view in which christianity may be considered. It may be considered either as an *instruction* communicated to mankind; or, as an extraordinary dispensation of providence, the end of which is the *redemption* of mankind. If we consider it in the former of these lights, it was a favour or blessing which, however desirable, could not be claimed, and might not have been given to any part of mankind. Were there reason for concluding, that it cannot be of divine original merely because the benefits of it are not extended equally to all, we should be obliged to conclude the same of almost every advantage we enjoy, and the whole course of nature.—If, on the other hand, we consider christianity in the latter of these lights, its end might have been answered, by Christ's passing through human life in the manner he did, though no history of him had been written, or

knowledge of him preserved in the world,
——In other words. There were two purposes of Christ's coming. He came to *teach* and to *reform* the world; but, this being an end that might have been accomplished by much lower means, we ought to remember, that he came principally to *save* the world. That is; He descended from heaven and appeared in our natures, partly, indeed, to be the founder of a visible church enjoying particular light and advantages, and which, after going through several revolutions, should, at last, triumph over every false religion and take in all nations; but, primarily, to be the *deliverer* of a distressed race, to acquire the power of forgiving sin and of raising us from the dead, to reinstate virtuous men, wherever or whenever they have lived, in the prospect of a glorious immortality; and thus to perform a service under the divine government of infinite importance, and to which, probably, no agent of inferior dignity was equal.—Christianity, therefore, is so far
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from implying an obligation on the Deity to make the knowledge of it universal, that, on the contrary, in the benefit of what is most essential to it, all virtuous men, whether they have ever heard of it or not, will be alike sharers.

Another very considerable cause of offence to the opposers of christianity is, the account given in the gospel history of the *Demoniacs*. It should, I think, go a great way here towards satisfying a fair inquirer, that the writers of the gospel history speak of the cases of the *Demoniacs* in no other way than was usual at the time they wrote, and in which we find them spoken of by other contemporary historians. They talk the language of their age and country, and in conformity to prevailing opinions. Nor is it of any consequence to the credit of their history, whether these opinions were right or wrong, or even what they themselves thought. To expect, that they should be better informed than others about the

causes of distempers ; or, that such instruction should be communicated to them as would have led them, in the present case, to form a new language and to speak with perfect accuracy, seems as unreasonable as it would be to entertain the same expectation with respect to the motion of the sun, or the secondary qualities of bodies. The one has as little to do with the main end of their office as the other. Such instruction, had it been given them, would have thrown needless difficulties in the way of the propagation of christianity ; and it must have lessened its evidence to subsequent ages, by making the apostles appear, not in the character of plain unlettered men, but of able philosophers, and thus raising a suspicion, that it prevailed in the world more by the wisdom of men, than by the power of God and *the demonstration of the Spirit*. Our Saviour, no doubt, might have taught the truth on this subject, and rectified the common apprehensions as far as they were erroneous. But it is impossible to shew, that
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there was sufficient reason for expecting this, or that it came properly within the purpose of his mission. It would, perhaps, have only given him the appearance of being a friend to the *doctrine of the Sadducees*, and embarrassed the minds of his followers, without doing any great good*.

The prejudices I have now in view, are derived, chiefly, from the strict notions which have prevailed of the universal and infallible inspiration of the writers of the
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* There is, perhaps, no part of the New Testament from which unbelievers receive more unfavourable impressions than the account of our Saviour's temptation in the wilderness by the devil. This fact has, I think, been very much misinterpreted. The explanation given of it in a piece entitled, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Design of Christ's Temptation in the Wilderness*, by Mr. Farmer; is, in my opinion, so rational and judicious, as to have no small tendency to remove the prejudices against it, and to convert this difficulty into a beauty.

I cannot help adding, that the same learned writer's Dissertation on *Miracles* lately published, well deserves to be studied by all who would be assisted in judging of some other parts of the Scripture History, as well as of the nature of Miracles in general, and the connection between them and the truth of the doctrines of Christianity.

New Testament. And there is not, perhaps, anything which the friends of christianity have more reason to complain of, than that unbelievers should suffer themselves to be influenced by these notions.—The gospel is not a speculative science, or an abstruse and complicated theory. Whatever jargon may have been fathered upon it in systems and creeds, it is in itself plain and simple. It is a set of facts exhibiting and demonstrating this one truth; ETERNAL LIFE, THE GIFT OF GOD, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. The New Testament contains a narrative of these facts. The business of the apostles was to attest and publish them to the world; and no inquiries, relating to their qualifications and authority, are of great importance in any other view, than as *witnesses* to these facts. I think, indeed, that they have an authority, as *teachers* as well as *witnesses*: But what they insist themselves most upon, is their office as witnesses, and the regard they claim is founded principally on their hav-

ing heard, and seen *, and handled the *word of life*. It does not appear, that in all matters of reasoning and speculation, the first christians entertained the same sentiments of their authority, that many do now. Be this, however, as it will; the only question, certainly, that affects the truth of christianity is, “Whether
“ they were honest men, who did not
“ mean to deceive, and who were com-
“ petently informed with respect to the
“ facts they attest.”——I wish the attention of unbelievers could be held to this, setting aside whatever is commonly believed, or, that there may be reason to believe on the subject of *inspiration*. If this appears, (as, I think, it does abundantly) christianity is proved; nor need any person be anxious about more in it than necessarily follows from hence.—But, it is time to come to the main design of this dissertation.

One of the objections that deserves most to be attended to, is that taken from the
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* 1 John i. 1, 2.

nature of the principal facts recorded in the scriptures. These are *miraculous*, and, as such, (it has been said) “ have a *particular incredibility* in them, which does “ not belong to *common* events. When we “ look into the Bible, we find ourselves “ transported, as it were, into a new “ world, where the course of nature is altered, and every thing is different from “ what we have been used to observe. “ Could we, in any other case, receive “ a book filled with visions and prodigies, “ and containing so much of the *marvellous*? Ought not such a book to startle “ our minds? Or can there be any evidence sufficient to establish its authority?”—Some have gone so far in this way of objecting, as to assert in general, that all relations of facts which contradict experience, or imply a deviation from the usual course of nature, are their own confutation, and should be at once rejected as incapable of proof, and impossible to be true.—One cannot be better employed than in inquiring how far such sentiments are right, and what regard is really

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due to *testimony*, when its reports do not agree with *experience*. I shall endeavour to state this matter as accurately as possible, by entering into a critical examination of the grounds of belief in this case, and of the nature and force of historical evidence.

In answer to the questions just proposed it might be said, that, supposing the state and connections of this world to be such as the Bible represents, the history it contains could not but be a history of extraordinary events; that it has many internal marks of truth and authority which no other book has; and that, particularly, we are witnesses to the accomplishment of predictions delivered in it thousands of years ago, and therefore, do ourselves see facts as wonderful as any of those it relates, and are sure that the writers of it were supernaturally instructed, and might also very probably, work miracles.—What has been last intimated is of the greatest importance. Christians insist, and they think they have proved, that there are
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very remarkable appearances of the completion of several scripture prophecies. The patrons of infidelity ought to shew, if they can, that there are not indeed any such appearances which deserve regard. Nothing can be more incumbent upon them than this: For, as far as there seems reason to believe, that, in any instance, a scripture prophecy is fulfilled, an unprejudiced person must be impressed. It affords, not only a demonstration of the credibility of miracles, but, in some degree, an *actual exhibition* of them.

But, it is not my present design to dwell on any arguments of this kind. In what follows, I shall confine myself to the examination of the *principles* on which the objection I have mentioned is founded. When these are proved to be fallacious, the way will be open to an easier admission of the *direct evidences* of christianity, and they will operate with greater force. — It is well known, that this objection has lately been urged in all its strength by Mr. *Hume*, a writer whose genius and abilities

abilities are so distinguished, as to be above any of *my* commendations. Several excellent answers have been published *; and it is not without some pain, after what has been so well and so effectually said by others, that I determine to take up this subject. I imagine, however, that it admits of further discussion, and that there remain still some observations to be made, which have not been enough attended to.—Before I proceed, it will be proper to give a more distinct and full account of the objection to be considered.

* By Dr. *Adams* in his *Essay on Miracles*, in answer to Mr. *Hume's Essay*; and by the author of the *Criterion*, or, *Miracles Examined*, &c.—And also by Dr. *Campbell*, *Principal of the Marischal college at Aberdeen*, in a Treatise, entitled, *A Dissertation on Miracles, containing an Examination of the Principles advanced by David Hume, Esq; in an Essay on Miracles*.—The last of these answers was published several years after the others. I mention this because, from Dr. *Campbell's* never referring to any other answers, as well as from his manner of expressing himself sometimes, an inattentive reader might be led to conclude that at the time he wrote, the subject was quite open to him. His book, however, has uncommon merit, and the public is much indebted to him for it.

S E C T. II.

*The Nature and Grounds of the Regard due
to Experience and to the Evidence of
Testimony, stated and compared.*

“ **E**XPERIENCE, we have been told,
“ is the ground of the credit we give
“ to *human testimony*. We have found,
“ in past instances, that men have in-
“ formed us right, and therefore are
“ disposed to believe them in future in-
“ stances. But this experience is by
“ no means constant; for we often find
“ that men prevaricate and deceive.—
“ On the other hand: What assures us
“ of those laws of nature, in the viola-
“ tion of which the notion of a miracle
“ consists, is, in like manner, experi-
“ ence. But, this is an experience that
“ has never been interrupted. We have
“ never been deceived in our expectations,
“ that the dead will not come to life, or
“ that

“ that the command of a man will not
 “ immediately cure a disease. There
 “ arises, therefore, from hence, a proof
 “ against accounts of miracles which
 “ is the strongest of the kind possible,
 “ and to believe such accounts on the
 “ authority of human testimony, is to
 “ prefer a weaker proof to a stronger;
 “ to leave a guide that *never* has de-
 “ ceived us, in order to follow one that
 “ has *often* deceived us; or to receive,
 “ upon the credit of an experience that
 “ is *weak* and *variable*, what is contrary
 “ to *invariable* experience.”

In other words: “ A miracle is an
 “ event, from the nature of it, inconsistent
 “ with all the experience we ever had, and
 “ in the highest degree incredible and ex-
 “ traordinary. In the falsehood of testi-
 “ mony, on the contrary, there is no such
 “ inconsistency, nor any such incredibility,
 “ scarcely any thing being more common.
 “ No regard, therefore, can be due to the
 “ latter, when it is applied as a proof of
 “ the former. According to this reason-

“ ing, we are always to compare the im-
 “ probability of a fact, with the improba-
 “ bility of the falsehood of the testimony
 “ which asserts it, and to determine our
 “ assent to that side on which the least
 “ improbability lies. Or, in the case of
 “ miracles, we are to consider which is
 “ most likely, that such events should
 “ happen, or that men should either de-
 “ ceive or be deceived. And, as there
 “ is nothing more unlikely than the for-
 “ mer, or much more common than the
 “ latter, particularly where religion is
 “ concerned; it will be right to form a
 “ *general resolution never to lend any at-*
 “ *tention to accounts of miracles, with*
 “ *whatever specious pretexts they may be*
 “ *covered*.*

“ It is, says Mr. Hume, *a maxim worthy*
 “ *of our attention, that no testimony is*
 “ *sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the*
 “ *testimony be of such a kind, that its*
 “ *false-*

* See the *Essay on Miracles*, in *Mr. Hume's Philosophical Essays concerning human Understanding*, p. 205. 2d edition, in the Note.

“ falsehood would be more miraculous than
 “ the fact which it endeavours to establish.
 “ And even in that case, there is a mutual
 “ destruction of arguments, and the superior
 “ only gives us an assurance suitable to that
 “ degree of force, which remains after de-
 “ ducting the inferior. When any one tells
 “ me that he saw a dead man restored to life,
 “ I immediately consider with myself, whe-
 “ ther it be more probable that the person
 “ should either deceive or be deceived, or
 “ that the fact he relates should really have
 “ happened. I weigh the one miracle
 “ against the other, and according to the
 “ superiority which I discover, I pronounce
 “ my decision, and always reject the greater
 “ miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony
 “ would be more miraculous than the event
 “ which he relates, then, and not till then,
 “ can he pretend to command my belief or
 “ opinion *.”—For such reasons as these,

Mr.

* 1b. P. 182.—P. 206. I desire any one to lay
 his hand on his heart, and after serious consideration
 declare, whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a

Mr. Hume asserts, "*That the evidence*
" of testimony, when applied to a miracle,
" carries falsehood upon the very face of it,
" and is more properly a subject of derision
" than of argument †; and that whoever
" believes the truth of the christian reli-
" gion, is conscious of a continued mira-
" cle in his own person, which subverts all
" the principles of his understanding, and
" gives him a determination to believe what
" is most contrary to custom and expe-
" rience ‡."

This is the objection in its complete force. It has, we see, a plausible appearance, and is urged with much confidence. But I cannot hesitate in asserting that it is founded on false principles; and I think, this must appear to be true, to any one who will bestow attention on the following observations.

The

book, (the Pentateuch) supported by such testimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates; which is however necessary, to make it be received, according to the measures of probability above established.

† Page 195.

‡ Page 207.

The principles on which this objection is built are chiefly, "That the credit we give to testimony, is derived *solely* from experience;" "That a miracle is a fact *contrary* to experience;" "That the previous improbability of a fact is a proof against it, diminishing, in proportion to the degree of it, the proof from testimony for it;" and "That no testimony should ever gain credit to an event, unless it is more extraordinary that it should be false, than that the event should have happened." I will, as briefly as possible, examine each of these assertions in the order in which they have been now mentioned.

With this view it is necessary first to consider the nature and the foundation of that assurance which experience gives us of the laws of nature. This assurance is nothing but the conviction we have, that future events will be agreeable to what we have hitherto found to be the course of nature, or the *expectation* arising in us, upon having observed that an event has

happened in former experiments, that it will happen again in *future* experiments. This expectation has been represented as one of the greatest mysteries, and the result of an ingenious and elaborate disquisition about it is, that it cannot be founded on any reason, and consists only in an association of ideas derived from habit, or a disposition in our imaginations to pass from the idea of one object to the idea of another which we have found to be its usual attendant *. But surely never before were such difficulties raised on a point so plain.—If I was to draw a slip of paper out of a wheel, where I knew there were more white than black papers, I should intuitively see, that there was a probability of drawing a white paper, and therefore should *expect* this; and he who should make a mystery of such an expectation, or apprehend any difficulty in accounting for it, would not deserve to be seriously argued with. In like manner; if, out of a wheel
the

* See Mr. Hume's Philosophical Essays, Essay 4th and 5th.

the particular contents of which I am ignorant of, I should draw a white paper a hundred times together, I should see that it was probable, that it had in it more white papers than black, and therefore should expect to draw a white paper the next trial. There is no more difficulty in this case than in the former; and it is equally absurd in both cases to ascribe the *expectation*, not to *knowledge*, but to *instinct*.—The case of our assurance of the laws of nature, as far as we are ignorant of the causes that operate in nature, is exactly the same with this. An experiment which has often succeeded, we expect to succeed again, because we perceive intuitively, that such a constancy of event must proceed from something in the constitution of natural causes, disposing them to produce it; nor will it be possible to deny this, till it can be proved, that it is not a first principle of reason, that of every thing that comes to pass there must be some account or cause; or, that a constant re-currency of the same event is not

a fact which requires any cause.—In a word: We trust experience, and expect that the future should resemble the past in the course of nature, for the very same reason that, supposing ourselves otherwise in the dark, we should conclude that a dye which has turned an ace ofteneft in *past* trials is mostly marked with aces, and consequently should expect, that it will go on to turn the same number ofteneft in *future* trials.—The ground of the expectation produced by experience being this, it is obvious that it will always be weaker or stronger, in proportion to the greater or less constancy and uniformity of our experience. Thus from the happening of an event in every trial a million of times, we should conclude more confidently, that it will happen again the next trial, than if it had happened less frequently, or if in some of these instances it had failed. The plain reason is, that in the former case it would appear that the causes producing the event are probably of a more fixed nature, and less liable to be

counteracted by opposite causes. It must, however, be remembered, that the greatest uniformity and frequency of experience will not afford a proper *proof*, that an event will happen in a future trial, or even render it so much as probable, that it will *always* happen in all future trials. —In order to explain this, let us suppose a solid which, for aught we know, may be constituted in any one of an infinity of different ways, and that we can judge of it only from experiments made in throwing it. The oftener we suppose ourselves to have seen it turn the same face, the more we should reckon upon its turning the same face, when thrown next. But though we knew, that it had turned the same face in every trial a million of times, there would be no *certain-ty*, that it would turn this face again in any particular future trial, nor even the least *probability*, that it would *never* turn any other face. What would appear would be only, that it was *likely*, that it had about a million and a half more of these

these sides than of all others * ; or that its nature was such as disposed it to turn this side oftener, in this proportion, than any

* If any one wants a further explication of what is here said, let him consider, that as there is only a *high probability*, not a *certainty*, that the supposed solid, after turning the same side a million of times without once failing, would turn again this side in the next trial, the probability must be less, that it would turn this side in *two* future trials, and still less, that it would do it in *three* future trials ; and thus, the probability will decrease continually as the number of the supposed trials is increased, till, at last, it will become an equal chance, and from thence pass into an improbability.—This may be a little differently represented thus. Let a solid be supposed that has 1,600,000 sides of the same sort, to one of any other sort. There is a probability, that in a million of trials, such a solid would turn constantly the same side. Such a supposition, therefore, would completely account for this event, supposing it to happen ; *and nothing further could, with reason, be concluded from it.* But, there is an *infinity* of other suppositions that will also account for it, of which the particular supposition that it has no sides of any other sort, and that, therefore, it will never turn any other, is *only one*. Against the truth, therefore, of this particular supposition, there must be, in the circumstances of ignorance above supposed, the greatest probability.

any other ; not that it had no other sides, or that it would never turn any others. In reality, there would be the greatest probability against this.—These observations are applicable, in the exactest manner, to what passes in the course of nature, as far as *experience* is our guide. Upon observing, that any natural event has happened often or invariably, we have only reason to expect that it will happen again, with an assurance proportioned to the frequency of our observations. But, we have no *absolute proof* that it will happen again in any particular future trial ; nor the least reason to believe that it will always happen *. For aught we

* In an essay published in vol. 53d of the *Philosophical Transactions*, what is said here and in the last note, is proved by mathematical demonstration, and a method shewn of determining the exact probability of all conclusions founded on induction.—This is plainly a curious and important problem, and it has so near a relation to the subject of this dissertation, that it will be proper just to mention the results of the solution of it in a few particular cases.

Suppose, 1st, all we know of an event to be, that it has happened ten times without failing, and that
it

we know, there may be occasions on which it will fail, and secret causes in the frame
of

it is inquired, what reason we shall have for thinking ourselves right, if we judge, that the probability of its happening in a single trial, lies somewhere between sixteen to one and two to one.—The answer is, that the chance for being right, would be .5013, or very nearly an equal chance.—Take next, the particular case mentioned above, and suppose, that a solid or dye, of whose number of sides and constitution we know nothing, except from experiments made in throwing it, has turned constantly the same face in a million of trials.—In these circumstances, it would be *improbable*, that it had *less* than 1,400,000 more of these sides or faces than of all others; and it would be also *improbable*, that it had *above* 1,600,000 more. The chance for the latter is .4647, and for the former .4895. There would, therefore, be no reason for thinking, that it would never turn any other side. On the contrary, it would be likely that this would happen in 1,600,000 trials.—In like manner, with respect to any event in nature, suppose the flowing of the tide, if it has flowed at the end of a certain interval a million of times, there would be the probability expressed by .5105, that the odds for its flowing again at the usual period was *greater* than 1,400,000 to 1, and the probability expressed by .5352, that the odds was *less* than 1,600,000 to one.

Such are the conclusions which *uniform* experience warrants.—What follows is a *specimen* of the expectations,

of things which *sometimes* may counteract those by which it is produced.

But

pectations, which it is reasonable to entertain in the case of *interrupted* or *variable* experience.—If we know no more of an event than that it has happened ten times in eleven trials, and failed once, and we should conclude from hence, that the probability of its happening in a single trial lies between the odds of nine to one, and eleven to one, there would be twelve to one *against* being right.—If it has happened a hundred times, and failed ten times, there would also be the odds of near three to one *against* being right in such a conclusion.—If it has happened a thousand times and failed a hundred, there would be an odds *for* being right of a little more than two to one. And, supposing the same *ratio* preserved of the number of happenings to the number of failures, and the same guess made, this odds will go on increasing for ever, as the number of trials is increased.—He who would see this explained and proved at large may consult the essay in the Philosophical Transactions, to which I have referred; and also the supplement to it in the 54th volume.—The specimen now given is enough to shew how very inaccurately we are apt to speak and judge on this subject, previously to calculation. See Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles, p. 175, 176, &c. and Dr. Campbell's Essay, Sect. 2d, p. 35.—It also demonstrates, that the order of events in nature is derived from permanent causes established by an intelligent

But to say no more at present of this. Let us, in the next place, consider what is the ground of the regard we pay to *human testimony*.—We may, I think, see plainly, that it is not experience only; meaning, all along, that kind of experience to which we owe our expectation of natural events, the causes of which are unknown to us. Were this the case, the regard we ought to pay to testimony, would be in proportion to the number of instances, in which we have found, that it has given us right information, compared with those in which it has deceived us; and it might be calculated in the same manner with the regard due to any conclusions derived from induction. But this is by no means the truth. One action,

telligent Being in the constitution of nature, and not from any of the powers of chance. And it further proves, that so far is it from being true, that the understanding is not the faculty which teaches us to rely on experience, that it is capable of determining, *in all cases*, what conclusions ought to be drawn from it, and what *precise degree* of confidence should be placed in it.

action, or one conversation with a man, may convince us of his integrity, and induce us to believe his testimony, though we had never, in a single instance, experienced his veracity. His manner of telling his story, its being corroborated by other testimony, and various particulars in the nature and circumstances of it, may satisfy us that it must be true. We feel in ourselves that a regard to truth is one principle in human nature; and we know, that there must be such a principle in every reasonable being, and that there is a necessary repugnancy between the perception of moral distinctions and deliberate falsehood. To this, chiefly, is owing the credit we give to human testimony. And from hence in particular, must be derived our belief of veracity in the Deity.—It might be shewn here in many ways, that there is a great difference between the conviction produced by testimony, and the conviction produced by experience. But I will content myself with just taking notice, that the one is capable of being carried

much higher than the other. When any events, in the course of nature, have often happened, we are sure, properly, of nothing but the past fact. Nor, I think, is there in general, antecedently to their happening, any comparison between the assurance we have that they will happen, and that which we have of many facts the knowledge of which we derive from testimony. For example; we are not so certain that the tide will go on to ebb and flow, and the sun to rise and set in the manner they have hitherto done, a year longer, as we are that there has been such a man as *Alexander*, or such an empire as the *Roman* *.

From

* It might have been added here, as another observation of considerable importance, that the greatest part of what is commonly called experience is merely the report of testimony. “ Our own experience (says an excellent writer) reaches around, and goes back but a little way; but the experience of others, on which we chiefly depend, is derived to us wholly from testimony.” *Dr. Adams’s Essay on Miracles*, p. 5th. — In proportion, therefore,

From these observations it follows, that to use *testimony* to prove a *miracle* implies no absurdity. It is not using a *feebler* experience to overthrow another of the same kind, which is *stronger*: But, using an argument to establish an event, which yields a direct and positive proof, and is capable of producing the strongest conviction to overthrow another founded on different principles, and which, at best, can prove no more than that, previously to the event, there would have appeared to us a presumption against its happening.

What I now mean will be greatly confirmed by observing, that a miracle cannot, with strict propriety, be styled an event *contrary* to experience. This is the second of the assertions in Mr. *Hume's* argument, which I have before mentioned, and to

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which

as we weaken the evidence of testimony, we weaken also that of experience; and in comparing them we ought in reason to oppose to the former only what remains of the latter after that part of it which is derived from the former, that is, after much the greatest part of it is deducted.

which there is, I think, reason to object. A miracle is more properly an event *different* from experience than *contrary* to it. Were I to see a tempest calmed instantaneously by the word of a man, all my past experience would remain the same; and were I to affirm that I saw what was contrary to it, I could only mean, that I saw what I never before had any experience of. In like manner; was I to be assured by eye witnesses that, on a particular occasion, some event, different from the usual course of things, had happened, testimony, in this case, would afford direct and peremptory evidence for the fact. But what information would experience give?——It would only tell me what happened on other occasions, and in other instances. Its evidence, therefore, would be entirely negative*. It would afford no proper proof that the event did not happen, for it can be no part of any one's experience, that the course of nature will continue always the

* See Dr. Adams's *Essay*, p. 9—24. 2d Edit.
p. 10—31. 3d Edit.

the same.—It cannot then be proper to assert (as Mr. *Hume* † does) that, in every case of a miracle supported by testimony, there is a contest of two opposite experiences, the strongest of which ought always to determine our judgments.

But this leads me to take notice of the fundamental error in this argument: an error which, I fancy, every person must be sensible of when it is mentioned, and for the sake of pointing out which chiefly this dissertation is written.—The error I mean is contained in the assertion, that “if, previously to an event, there
“ was a greater probability *against* its
“ happening, than there is *for* the truth
“ of the testimony endeavouring to es-
“ tablish it, the former destroys the lat-
“ ter, and renders the event unlikely to
“ have happened in proportion to its su-
“ periority.” That this is a fundamental point in Mr. *Hume*’s objection must be apparent to those who have con-

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sidered

† *Essay on Miracles*, p. 179.

sidered it. By the contest between two opposite experiences in miraculous facts supported by testimony, the greatest of which always destroys the other as far as its force goes; he cannot consistently mean any thing but this. One of the opposite experiences must be that which acquaints us with the course of nature, and by which, as before explained, it is rendered probable in proportion to the number of instances in which an event has happened, that it will happen in future trials. The other must be that from whence the credit we give to testimony is derived, which, according to Mr. *Hume*, being our observation of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses, makes it probable that any event reported by witnesses has happened, in proportion to what we have experienced of this conformity. Now, as in the case of miraculous facts these probabilities oppose one another, and the greatest, according to Mr. *Hume*, must be the first, because the experience which produces it
is

is constant and invariable; it follows, that there must be always a great overbalance of evidence against their reality. He seems to lay it down as a general maxim, that if it is more improbable that any fact should have really happened, than that men should either deceive or be deceived, it should be rejected by us.—But, it must be needless to take any pains to shew, that the turning point in Mr. Hume's argument is that which I have mentioned; or, in other words, the principle, that no testimony should engage our belief, except the improbability in the falsehood of it is greater than that in the event which it attests*.

In order to make it appear that this is an error, what I desire may be considered

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is,

* Let it be remembered, that the improbability of event here mentioned, must mean the improbability which we should have seen there was of its happening independently of any evidence for it, or, previously to the evidence of testimony informing us that it *has* happened. No other improbability can be meant, because the whole dispute is about the improbability that remains after the evidence of testimony given for the event.

is, the degree of improbability which there is against almost all the most common facts, independently of the evidence of testimony for them. In many cases of particular histories which are immediately believed upon the slightest testimony, there would have appeared to us, previously to this testimony, an improbability of almost infinity to one against their reality, as any one must perceive, who will think how sure he is of the falsehood of all facts that have *no* evidence to support them, or which he has only *imagined* to himself. It is then very common for the slightest testimony to overcome an almost infinite improbability.

To make this more evident: Let us suppose, that testimony informed us rightly ten times to one in which it deceived us; and that there was nothing to direct our judgments concerning the regard due to witnesses, besides the degree of conformity which we have experienced in past events to their reports. In this case, there

there would be the probability of ten to one for the reality of every fact supported by testimony. Suppose then that it informs me of the success of a person in an affair, against the success of which there was the probability of a hundred to one, or of any other event previously improbable in this proportion. I ask, What, on this supposition, would be, on the whole the probability that the event really happened? Would the right way of computing be, to compare the probability of the truth of the testimony with the probability that the event would not happen, and to reject the event with a confidence proportioned to the superiority of the latter above the former? This Mr. *Hume* directs; but certainly contrary to all reason.—The truth is, that the testimony would give the probability of ten to one to the event, unabated by the supposed probability against it. And one reason of this is, that the very experience which teaches us to give credit to testimony, is an experience by which we have

found, that it has informed us rightly concerning facts, in which there would have appeared to us, previously, a great improbability.

But to be yet more explicit; Let us suppose the event reported by testimony to be, that a particular side of a die was thrown twice in two trials, and that the testimony is of such a nature that it has as often informed us wrong as right. In this case there would plainly be an equal chance for the reality of the event, though previously, there was the probability of thirty-five to one against it: And every one would see, that it would be absurd to say, that there being so considerable a probability against the event, and no probability at all for the truth of the testimony; or, that having had much more frequent experience that two trials have not turned up the same face of a die, than of the conformity of facts to the supposed testimony, therefore, no regard is due to the testimony.—An evidence

evidence that is *often* connected with truth, though not *oftener* than with falsehood, is real evidence, and deserves regard. To reject such evidence would be to fall *often* into error, whatever improbabilities may attend the events to which it is applied; and to assert the contrary, would be to assert a manifest contradiction.

The end of a news-paper confines it, in a great measure, to the relation of such facts as are uncommon. Suppose that it reports truth only twice in three times, and that there are *nine* such uncommon facts reported by it as, that a certain person is alive in his hundredth year, that another was struck dead by lightning, or that a woman has been delivered of three children at a birth; Would it be right to reject *all* these facts, because more extraordinary than the report of falsehood by the news-paper? To say this, would be to say, that what, by supposition, reports truth *six* times in *nine*, does not report truth *once* in nine times.

But

But let us take a higher case of this kind. The improbability of drawing a lottery in any particular assigned manner, independently of the evidence of testimony, or of our own senses, acquainting us that it *has* been drawn in that manner, is such as exceeds all conception *. And yet the most common testimony is sufficient

* This improbability is as the number of different ways which there are of drawing the lottery; or, as the number of permutations which a number of things, equal to that of the tickets in the lottery, admits of. In a lottery, therefore, of 50,000 tickets, this improbability is expressed by the proportion of $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6$, &c. continued to 50,000 to one. Or, it is the same with that of drawing such a lottery exactly in the order of the numbers, first 1, then 2, and so on to the last. Most persons will scarcely be able to persuade themselves, that this is not an absolute impossibility; and yet in truth, it is equally possible, and was beforehand equally probable with that very way in which, after drawing the lottery, we believe it has been drawn: And what is similar to this is true of almost every thing that can be offered to our assent, independently of any evidence for it; and particularly, of numberless facts which are the objects of testimony, and which are continually believed, without the least hesitation, upon its authority.

cient to put us out of doubt about it. Suppose here a person was to reject the evidence offered him on the pretence, that the improbability of the falsehood of it is almost infinitely less than that of the event *; or, suppose, that universally a person was to reject all accounts which he

* The false principle, which is the foundation of this method of reasoning, has been too easily received. Several considerable writers, as well as Mr. Hume, seem to have been deceived by it. Had not this been, in some degree, true of even Dr. Campbell, he would perhaps have expressed himself differently in some parts of the first and sixth sections of the first part of his very judicious dissertation before mentioned. In the case he supposes, of the loss of a passage boat which had crossed a river two thousand times safely; it is plain, that an evidence of much less weight than the probability, that an experiment which had succeeded two thousand times will succeed the next time would be sufficient to convince us of the reality of the event. Any report that has been oftener found to be true than false would engage belief, tho' the conviction we should have had, supposing no such report, that the event did not happen, would have been much stronger than any that the report itself is capable of producing. The reason of this has been assigned above.

he reads or hears of facts which are more uncommon, than it is that he should read or hear what is false: What would be thought of such a person? How soon would he be made to see and acknowledge his mistake?

In the case I have mentioned of a newspaper supposed to report truth twice in three times, the odds of *two* to *one*, would overcome the odds of *thousands* to *one*. This is no more than saying, that an evidence which, in cases where there were great odds against an event, has been found true twice in three times, *is* true in such cases twice in three times, and communicates the probability of 2 to 1 to the event to which it is applied. Every one will see that this is an assertion so plainly true as to be trifling; and yet the principal part of what I am here asserting may be reduced to it.—The previous improbability of most common facts, that is, the improbability we should see to be in them were they unconnected with all evidence
for

for them, is, I have observed, very great. We have, generally, found testimony right, when applied to such facts. It is therefore reasonable to give credit to it when so applied, though not so likely to be true as it was that the facts should not happen : And saying this, is only saying, that an evidence *generally* right ought to be received as being so, notwithstanding improbabilities by which we have found it not to be affected ; I will add, and by which too we know that it is *its nature* not to be affected.

What has been last said requires explanation ; and it will be proper to dwell a little upon it, in order more fully to shew the nature of historical evidence, and the reason and truth of all I have said concerning it.—What I desire may be here attended to is chiefly the following assertion, “ that improbabilities *as such* do not “ lessen the capacity of testimony to re- “ port truth.”—The only causes of falsehood in testimony are the intention to deceive, and the danger of being deceived.

Setting

Setting aside the former, let us, for the sake of greater precision, confine our views at present to the latter, or suppose a case where there are no motives to deceive, and where therefore the only source of mis-information from testimony is the danger of being deceived. Let us likewise suppose that this danger is such as makes testimony liable to be wrong once in ten times. Now, I say, that such testimony would communicate its own probability to *every* event reported by it of which sense is *equally* a judge, whether the odds against that event, or the previous improbability in it is more or less.—For instance. A person, who in the dark should take a black-ball out of a heap of 67 white-balls, and 33 black, would do what there were the odds of two to one against his doing. He, therefore, who should report this, would report an event which was improbable as two to one; and a person who should affirm that there was no improbability to be removed by the report, would affirm a palpable falsehood. Now, to this fact, the testimony I have supposed,

supposed, would give the probability of *nine* to one, notwithstanding its previous improbability. Such a testimony would do the same if its report was, that a black-ball had been in the same manner taken out of a heap containing 90 white-balls and ten black, or 99 white and one black. That is; it would afford equal evidence whether the improbability of the event was 2 to 1, 10 to 1, or 99 to 1. —The like will appear, if we suppose the reports of such a testimony applied to the particular faces thrown with a set of dies. It would make no difference, whether its reports were applied to the faces thrown with a set of dies of 6 sides or a thousand sides, or to any *different* faces thrown with them, or any *coincidence* of faces. Supposing any considerable number of such reports, the nature of the thing implies, that an equal proportion of them would be found to be true in either case; because, by supposition, however different the improbabilities are, the only cause of mis-information, namely, the danger of a deception of the senses, does

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not operate more in one case than in the other.—In other words. The improbabilities I mean, being no hindrance to the perceptions of sense, make no opposition to the testimony of a witness who reports honestly from sense; and, therefore, saying that such a testimony, tho' the probability of its own truth is but 9 to 1, will overcome equally an improbability of 2 to 1, 10 to 1, or 99 to 1, is no more than saying, that it is equally an over-match for any one of a number of things, by which it is not opposed.—In short. TESTIMONY is truly no more than SENSE at second-hand: and improbabilities, in the circumstances not supposed, can have no more effect on the evidence of the one, than on the evidence of the other.

It is obvious that similar observations might be made on the other cause which I have mentioned of falsehood in testimony. If in any case it cannot be supposed that a witness is deceived, his report will give an

event that precise degree of probability which there is of his not intending to deceive, be the event what it will.

A due attention to these observations will, I think, shew the reason of the little effect which, in numberless instances, very great previous improbabilities have, when set against the weakest direct testimony. No one can be at a loss to account for this where he has the evidence of *sense*. It appears that there is no greater difficulty in accounting for it, where we have the evidence of *testimony*.

It should be remembered, that nothing I have said implies, that improbabilities ought never to have any influence on our opinion of testimony. Improbabilities, I have observed, *as such*, do not affect the *capacity* of testimony to report truth. They have no *direct* and necessary operation upon it, and should not be considered as a *counter-evidence* invalidating, in proportion to their degree, its reports. — But tho' this is true, it by no means

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follows,

follows, that they may not in many circumstances affect the *credit* of testimony, or cause us to question its veracity. They have sometimes this effect on even the * reports of sense, and, therefore, may also on the reports of testimony. This will happen, first, when they are of such a nature as to carry the appearance of *impossibilities*. Every such appearance is indeed properly a counter-evidence; and testimony, when applied in such circumstances, cannot gain credit any further than there is a greater probability of its truth, than there is of the impossibility of the
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* Were we to *see* any thing very strange and incredible, it would be natural at first to doubt whether our eyes did not deceive us. But if it appeared to us repeatedly, and for a length of time, and others saw the same, we should soon be as well convinced of its reality, as of any other object of sense.—The like is true in the case of *testimony*. If any thing reported to us is so strange that we cannot trust any single witness so far as to believe it, the agreement of a number of independent witnesses may produce such an increase of evidence, as shall leave no more possibility of doubting about it than if we had been ourselves witnesses of it.

the fact. Thus; if I was to hear a report, that a person was in *one* place at a time when I apprehended him to be in *another*, I could not give my assent till it appeared, that I had less reason for thinking myself right in this apprehension, than for believing the report. The same is true in all cases where seeming impossibilities or inconsistencies are reported. But, between *impossibilities* and *improbabilities*, however apt we may be to confound them, there is an infinite difference; and no conclusion can be drawn from the one to the other. There are few of the most *incredible* facts that can, with any reason, be called *impossible*. With respect to *miracles*, particularly, there are no arguments which have a tendency to prove this concerning them; or were it even true, that there are such arguments, their utmost effect, agreeably to the observation just made, would be, not to *destroy* the evidence of christianity, but to *counter-balance* it; and there might be still reason to believe christianity,

unless it appeared that their force was such as to *outweigh* the force of the evidence for it. Testimony sometimes has convinced men of facts which they judged to be impossible; that is, it has convinced them that they were wrong in this opinion. Kindling spirits by a touch from ice would appear, to a common person, impossible. The evidence of sense, however, would immediately convince him of the contrary; and from the preceding reasoning, I think, it appears, that there is nothing which sense is capable of proving that testimony may not also prove.

But, *Secondly*, The chief reason of the effect of improbabilities on our regard to testimony is, their tendency to influence the principles of deceit in the human mind. They have *of themselves*, I have said, no effect on the perceptions of sense, and therefore none on any faithful reports from sense. They may, however, *when perceived*, lead us to question the faithfulness

fulness of a report, and give just ground to suspect a design to misrepresent or exaggerate. A *given probability* of testimony communicates itself always entire to an event; but an event may be of such a nature as to lead us to doubt, whether there is that probability or not. —My meaning here will be explained by the following considerations.

Whenever any particular improbabilities appear, or a fact has any thing of the air of the marvellous, the passions are necessarily engaged, and we know that a temptation to deceive takes place in order to draw attention and excite wonder. On the contrary; when a fact is such as not at all to *interest*, or to give any room for imagining that men can intend deceit, we immediately believe it, without minding any previous improbabilities. It is for this reason, that we easily believe any story of a common nature, however complicated, tho' improbable, when the support of testimony is taken from it, almost as infini-

ty to one. But when a story is told us, which is attended with any circumstances not common, or in any way calculated to produce surprize, we place ourselves on our guard, and very reasonably give our assent with caution, because we see that in this case there is room for fearing the operation of the principles of deceit.—Thus; were we to receive an account that number 1500 was the *first* drawn in a lottery, we should immediately believe it; but were we to hear that number 1 was the *first* drawn, we should hesitate and doubt, though the improbability of the event gives no more reason for hesitation in the one case than the other; it being certainly no more unlikely, that number 1 should be *first* drawn, than number 1500.

Were we sure in instances of this kind, that the story which surprizes, and the story which does not surprize, came to us from persons who had no more thought of deceiving in one case than in the other, we should in both cases give our assent with
equal

equal readiness; and it would be unreasonable to do otherwise. For instance; were a person to tell us that, in passing thro' Guildhall at the time of drawing a lottery, he happened to hear his age, the day of the month, and the date of the year drawn together, we should scarcely believe him, though we know that he was not more unlikely to hear these numbers drawn, than any other particular numbers. But if the same person was only to tell us the numbers themselves, and the co-incidence which strikes us was entirely our own discovery, we should have just the same reason for believing his account, as if there had been no such co-incidence. In like manner; if before the beginning of drawing a lottery, we suppose a wager laid in a company, that a particular number shall be first drawn, and if afterwards, one who only knows of the wager, without being any way interested in it, should come and report to the company that he had heard that very number first drawn, he would not easily gain credit. But if

a stranger, ignorant of the wager, was to come accidentally, and to make the same report, he would be believed. The reason is obvious. It would appear that probably the last of these reporters had nothing but the reality of the fact to lead him to report this number rather than any other ; whereas the contrary would appear to be true of the other.

These observations may be applied to every case in which historical evidence is concerned. A *given* force of testimony never wants ability to produce belief proportioned to its degree ; but the situation of reporters and the circumstances of facts may be such as may render us doubtful whether that *given force* is *really* applied. As far as it appears that there is no ground for any doubts of this kind, we are equally forced to believe in all cases. Were we even to receive an account that a lottery had been drawn in the very order of the numbers, in a manner which gave us as little reason to suspect

suspect the danger of mistake and deceit, as there is when we are informed that it has been drawn in any other order, we should be obliged to give our assent.

All that has been here asserted may be justly applied to the case of miracles reported by testimony.—Uncommon facts, *as such*, are not less subject to the cognizance of *sense* than the most ordinary. It is as competent a judge, for instance, of a man eight feet high, as of a man five or six feet high, and of the restoration of a withered limb, or the instantaneous cure of a disease, by speaking a word, as of the amputation of a limb, or the gradual cure of a disease by the use of medicines: And were a set of such facts to be related to us by eye and ear-witnesses, who appeared no more to mean deceit than persons in general do when they relate any thing of a common nature, we should be under a necessity of believing them.—In particular; were there no more reason to question the sincerity of the Apostles
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when they tell us, that they saw Jesus perform his wonderful works, that they conversed with him familiarly for many days after his resurrection, that he ascended to heaven before their eyes, and that afterwards, in consequence of being endued *with power from on high*, agreeably to his promise, they went about through all the world preaching the doctrine of *eternal life through him*, and converting men from idolatry and vice, God himself bearing witness with them *by divers miracles, and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Ghost* *: Were there, I say, no more reason to question the honesty of the Apostles when they deliver this part of their history, than when they give an account of the affairs of the Jews and Romans, of the ignominious sufferings and crucifixion of Christ under Pilate, of Peter's denial, Judas's treachery, and other events of a similar nature, we should be obliged alike
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* Heb. ii. 4.—Rom. xv. 18, 19.

to receive both. This, indeed, seems to me to be nearly the truth †. The *extraordinary* facts they relate are so blended with the *common*, and told with so much of the appearance of a like artless simplicity in both cases, as has, I think, a strong tendency to impress an attentive and impartial mind.

† “The Gospels and the Acts afford us the same
“ historical evidence of the miracles of Christ and the
“ Apostles, as of the common matters related in
“ them. This indeed could not have been affirmed
“ by any reasonable man, if the authors of these
“ books, like many other historians, had appeared to
“ aim at an entertaining manner of writing, tho’
“ they had in their works interspersed miracles at
“ proper distances and on proper occasions. These
“ might have animated a dull relation, amused the
“ reader, and engaged his attention.—But the facts,
“ both miraculous and natural in scripture, are re-
“ lated in plain unadorned narratives ; and both of
“ them appear in all respects to stand upon the same
“ foot of historical evidence.” *Butler’s Analogy*,
Part II. Chap. 7.

S E C T. III.

Of the Credibility of Miracles, and the Force of Testimony when employed to prove them.

IT has, I hope, been sufficiently proved in the last section, that the influence of improbabilities on historical evidence is by no means such as Mr. Hume asserts, and that there cannot be any such incredibility in miracles as renders them incapable of being proved by testimony. We have seen that testimony is continually overcoming greater improbabilities than those of its own falsehood, and that, like the evidence of *sense*, the capacity of doing this is implied in its very nature.—The objection therefore, grounded on the supposed absurdity of trusting a feebler experience in opposition to a stronger, or of believing
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ing testimony, when it reports facts more improbable and extraordinary than falsehood and deception, is fallacious.

I must add what deserves particular notice, that what has been said shews us that Mr. Hume's argument would prove nothing even tho' one of the principles before opposed were granted, namely, that we derive our regard to testimony from experience in the same manner with our assurance of the laws and course of nature.

It is not necessary to the purpose of this Dissertation that I should proceed any further. The improbability, however, attending miracles being a point that strongly affects the minds of many persons, I cannot help entering a little further into the consideration of it, in order to shew more fully how much it has been magnified, and with what propriety and effect testimony may be employed to gain credit to the supernatural facts of Christianity.—This shall be my business in the
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greatest part of what remains of this Dissertation.

There are many events, not miraculous, which yet have a previous incredibility in them similar to that of miracles, and by no means inferior to it. The events I mean, are all such *phænomena* in nature as are quite new and strange to us. No one can doubt whether these are capable of full proof by testimony.—I could, for instance, engage by my own single testimony to convince any reasonable person, that I have known one of the human species, neither deformed nor an idiot, and only thirty inches high, who arrived at his most mature state at seven years of age, and weighed then eighteen pounds; but from that time gradually declined, and died at seventeen, weighing only twelve pounds, and with almost every mark of old age upon him. Now, according to Mr Hume's argument, no testimony can prove such a fact; for it might be said, that nothing being more *common* than the falsehood of testimony, nor more *uncommon* than such a fact, it must

must be contrary to all reason to believe it on the evidence of testimony.

It deserves particular notice here, that in judging from experience concerning the probability of events, we should always take care to satisfy ourselves, that there is nothing wanting to render the cases, from which we argue, perfectly alike. Our knowledge that an event has always or generally happened in certain circumstances, gives no reason for believing that the same event will happen, when these circumstances are altered: And, in truth, we are so ignorant of the constitution of the world and of the springs of events, that it is seldom possible for us to know what different *phænomena* may take place, on any the least change in the situation of nature, or the circumstances of objects. It was inattention to this that occasioned the mistake of that king of *Siam*, mentioned by Mr. *Locke*, who rejected, as utterly incredible, the account which was given

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him of the effects of cold upon water in Europe. His unbelief was plainly the effect of ignorance. And this indeed is almost as often the case with unbelief, as with its contrary. Give to a common man an account of the most remarkable experiments in natural philosophy: Tell him that you can *freeze* him to death by blowing warm air upon him before a good *fire*; or that you often divert yourself with bottling up lightning and discharging it thro' the bodies of your acquaintance; and he will perhaps look upon you as crazy, or, at least, he will think himself sure that you mean to deceive him. Could we suppose him to have adopted Mr. Hume's method of reasoning, he might say, "That what
" you acquaint him with is contrary to
" uniform experience; that he cannot be-
" lieve you without quitting a guide that
" has never deceived him, to follow one
" which is continually deceiving him;
" and that, therefore, such facts, when
" reported by testimony, are more pro-
" perly

“perly subjects of *derision* than *argument*.” But, how obvious would be the weakness of his reasoning?—A person in such circumstances, who thought justly, would consider how complicated and extensive the frame of nature is, and how little a way his observations have reached. This would shew him that he can be no competent judge of the powers of nature, and lead him to expect to find in it things strange and wonderful, and consequently to enquire what regard is due to the testimony which informs him of such facts, rather than hastily to reject them.—One cannot help being greatly disgusted with the inclination which shews itself in many persons, to treat with contempt whatever they hear, be it ever so well attested, if it happens that they are not able to account for it, or that it does not coincide with their experience, just as if they knew all that can take place in nature, or as if their experience was the standard of truth and the measure of possibility. This is to give themselves up to the influence of a

principle which has a tendency to unfit them for society, and, in effect, barring their minds against light and improvement. If we would be truly wise, we ought, at the same time that we are upon our guard against deception, to avoid carefully a vain scepticism, preserving openness with respect to *any* evidence that can be offered to us on every subject, from a sense of our own ignorance and narrow views.—But to come more directly to the subject under consideration.

There is, I have said, no greater incredibility in a miracle, than in such facts as those I have mentioned. It has been already shewn, p. 393, &c. that the most uniform experience affords no reason for concluding, that the course of nature will *never* be interrupted, or that any natural event which has hitherto happened, will *always* happen. It has appeared, on the contrary, that there must be always reason *against* this conclusion. There may, I have said, be secret causes which

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will sometimes counteract those by which the course of nature is carried on. We are under no more necessity of thinking that it must be the same in all *ages* than in all *climates*. During the continuance of a world, there may be periods and emergencies in which its affairs may take a new turn, and very extraordinary events happen.—In particular, there are, for aught we know, superior beings who may sometimes interpose in our affairs, and over-rule the usual operations of natural causes*. We are so far from having any reason to deny this, that if any end worthy of such an interposition appears, nothing is more credible.—There was, undoubtedly, a time when this earth was reduced into its present habitable state and form. This must

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have

* Sure it is, that Mr. Hume, at least, cannot dispute the credibility of this, who has said of the system of pagan *mythology*, that it seems *more than probable* that somewhere or other in the universe, it is really carried into execution. *Natural History of Religion*, Sect. 11th.

have been a time of miracles, or of the exertion of supernatural power. Why must this power have then so entirely withdrawn itself, as never to appear afterwards? The vanishing of old stars, and the appearance of new ones, is probably owing to the destruction of old worlds, and the creation of new worlds. It is reasonable to believe that events of this kind are continually happening in the immense universe; and it is certain, that they must be brought about under the direction of some superior power. There is, therefore, the constant exertion of such power in the universe. Why must it be thought that, in the lapse of six thousand years, there have been no occasions on which it has been exerted on our globe?

What I am now saying is true on the supposition that a miracle, according to the common opinion, implies a *violation* or *suspension* of the laws of nature. But, in reality, this is by no means necessarily

included in the idea of a miracle. A sensible and *extraordinary effect* produced by *superior power*, no more implies that a law of nature is *violated*, than any *common effect* produced by *human power*. This has been explained in the dissertation on Providence, p. 80, 81. and it has a considerable tendency to render the admission of a miracle more easy.

These observations demonstrate, that there is nothing of the improbability in miracles which some have imagined. I may even venture to say, that they have in them a much less degree of improbability, than there was, antecedently to observations and experiments, in such *phænomena* as *comets*, or such powers as those of *magnetism* and *electricity*. My reason for this assertion is, that it is far more likely that the course of nature should some time or other fail, than that any particular powers or effects should exist in nature, which we could before-hand guess.

A due attention to these arguments will necessarily dispose a candid enquirer to give a patient hearing to any testimony which assures him, that there actually have been miracles. It appears that to decline this, under the pretence that nothing different from the common course of things can be proved by testimony, is extremely unreasonable.—The miracles of the New Testament, in particular, have many circumstances attending them which recommend them strongly to our good opinion, and which lay us under indispensable obligations to give the evidence for them a fair and patient examination. Such is the state of mankind, that there is nothing more credible, than that our affairs have not always been suffered to go on entirely of themselves. A revelation to instruct and reform a sinful and degenerate world is so far from implying any absurdity, that it is an effect of divine goodness which might very reasonably be hoped for. There appears to have been great need of it; and it seems to be certain, that there
must

must have been a revelation at the beginning of the world. If we reject the miracles mentioned in the New Testament, it will not be possible to give any tolerable account of the establishment of such a religion as the christian among mankind, by a few persons of no education or learning, in opposition to all the prejudices and powers of the world. The excellence of the end for which they were wrought; the myriads of mankind which they brought over to piety and goodness, and the amazing turn they gave to the state of religion by destroying, in a few years, a system of idolatry which had been the work of ages, and establishing on its ruins the knowledge and worship of the one true God; these, and various other undeniable facts which might be enumerated, give them a high credibility. We see here an occasion worthy of the use of such means, and a probability that, if ever since the creation there has been any interposition of superior power, this was the time.

C O N C L U S I O N.

Enough has been now said in answer to the objection which has been the chief subject of this dissertation*. The necessary
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* Some of the principal observations which I have made may be found in the chapter of Bishop *Butler's Analogy* on the *supposed presumption against a Revelation, considered as miraculous*. Had I remembered this, it is probable I should not have thought of drawing up this dissertation. The greatest part of the passage I refer to I shall here give, in order to save the reader the trouble of turning to it, and also to enable him to judge how far what I have writ, should it answer no other end, may be of use to illustrate and strengthen what this excellent author has said.

“ First of all, there is a very strong presumption
“ against common speculative truths, and against the
“ most ordinary facts before the proof of them,
“ which yet is overcome by almost any proof. There
“ is a presumption of millions to one against the story
“ of Cæsar, or any other man. For, suppose a num-
“ ber of common facts so and so circumstanced, of
“ which one had no kind of proof, should happen to
“ come into one's thoughts, every one would, with-
“ out any possible doubt, conclude them to be false.
“ And

conclusion from it is, that the main business of those who oppose christianity should

“ And the like may be said of a single common fact.
 “ And from hence it appears, that the question of
 “ importance, as to the matter before us, is concerning
 “ the degree of the peculiar presumption supposed
 “ against miracles; not whether there be any pre-
 “ sumption at all against them. For, if there be the
 “ presumption of millions to one against the most
 “ common facts; what can a small presumption,
 “ additional to this, amount to, though it be pecu-
 “ liar? It cannot be estimated, and is as nothing.
 “ The only material question is, whether there be
 “ any such presumption against miracles, as to ren-
 “ der them in any sort incredible. *Secondly*, If we
 “ leave out the consideration of religion, we are in
 “ such total darkness upon what causes, occasions,
 “ reasons or circumstances the present course of
 “ nature depends, that there does not appear any
 “ improbability for or against supposing, that five or
 “ six thousand years may have given scope for causes,
 “ occasions, reasons or circumstances, from whence
 “ miraculous interpositions may have arisen. And
 “ from this, joined with the foregoing observation,
 “ it will follow, that there must be a presumption,
 “ beyond all comparison greater, against the *par-*
 “ *ticular* common facts just now instanced in, than
 “ against miracles *in general*, before any evidence
 “ of

should be, to invalidate the *direct* evidence for it. Every attempt of this kind would
deserve

“ of either. But, *thirdly*, take in the consideration
“ of religion, or the moral system of the world, and
“ then we see distinct particular reasons for miracles; to afford mankind instruction, additional to
“ that of nature, and to attest the truth of it.—
“ *Lastly*, Miracles must not be compared to common natural events, but to the extraordinary phenomena of nature. And then the comparison will
“ be between the presumption against miracles, and
“ the presumption against such uncommon appearances, suppose, as comets, and against there being any such powers in nature as magnetism and
“ electricity, so contrary to the properties of other
“ bodies, not endued with these powers.—Upon
“ all this, I conclude, that there is certainly no such
“ presumption against miracles as to render them in
“ any wise incredible. That on the contrary, our
“ being able to discern reasons for them gives a positive credibility to the history of them, in cases
“ where those reasons hold: And that it is by no
“ means certain, that there is any peculiar presumption at all, from analogy, against miracles, as distinguished from other extraordinary phenomena.”

Analogy of Religion, &c. p. 243, &c.

Since the first publication of these Dissertations, what is said in this passage of “ the improbability in
common

deserve the most serious regard ; and, it is vain to think of overthrowing christi-
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common facts," has been controverted by persons of whose judgment I have reason to entertain a high opinion. I must, therefore, beg leave here to recal the reader's attention to this subject, by laying before him some further observations upon it. Those who are already satisfied, and to whom probably, in what follows, I shall appear too minute and tedious, will, I hope, excuse me.

In order to discover whether there is an improbability in common facts, independently of the testimony on whose credit they are believed, let the connexion of such facts with testimony be withdrawn, and then let it be considered what they are. If upon doing this ; that is, if upon making them objects of imagination unsupported by any proof, they become improbable, the point, I should think, will be determined : For to find that a fact, when its connexion with testimony is withdrawn, becomes improbable, is the same as to find, that, independently of testimony, it *is* improbable. A fact reported by testimony, if it has in itself no improbability, will continue to have no improbability when the support of testimony is taken away. This is true of such a fact as that it froze in England between the 1st and 10th of last January ; but the contrary is true of such facts as that the king was then ill, or that the ministry was then changed, and such and such persons advanced to
power.

anity in any other way. As far as there is reason to believe, that the Apostles were
neither

power.—I cannot conceive of any clearer way of deciding any point than this is. However, as to some it is not satisfactory, let us consider this point in other lights, taking along with us the following definitions and propositions.

Definition 1st. An event is *probable*, when the odds *for* its happening are greater than those *against* its happening; *improbable*, when the odds *against* are greater than those *for*; and neither *probable* nor *improbable* when these odds are equal.—This is the proper sense of these words; but the writers on the *doctrine of chances* use the word *probable* in a more general sense.

Definition 2d. Two events are *independent*, when the happening of one of them has no influence on the other.

Proposition 1st. The improbabilities of *independent* events are the same whether they are considered *jointly* or *separately*. That is; the improbability of an event remains the same, whether any other event which has no influence upon it happens at the same time with it, or not. This is self-evident.

Proposition 2d. The *improbability* that two independent events, each of them not improbable, should both happen, cannot be greater than the odds of *three to one*; this being the odds that two equal chances shall not both happen; and an equal chance being
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neither deceived, nor intended to deceive,
we are under a necessity of receiving the
facts

the lowest event of which it can be said that it is not improbable. Thus, in throwing up a half-penny, I have an equal chance for turning up *heads*. Another also, in doing this at the same time, has an equal chance for turning up heads. It is *improbable* that we should both of us turn up heads, and this improbability is the odds of *three* to one. If two events are in any degree *probable*, there is not so much as these odds against their co-incidence.

From these premises will arise a *demonstration* that common facts, or (to speak more properly) particular facts of a common nature, have a very high improbability in them which is conquered by testimony. For, in order to be sufficiently explicit, let us take the two following facts: "The laying of a wager that " number 1500 shall be first drawn in a lottery;" and " the actual drawing of that number first." These are independent events; for laying the wager cannot of itself have any influence on the *probability* or *improbability* of drawing the number about which it is laid. They are also, when taken separately, common facts, and would either of them, if reported separately, be believed without scruple on common testimony. When reported together; that is, when it is said that they have both happened, every one is necessarily sensible of an improbability, and that this improbability is at least 49,999 to 1, supposing
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facts to which they gave witness, tho' miraculous. Let then unbelievers prove, if

ing the number of tickets in the lottery to be 50,000. But, by proposition 2d, there could not be a greater improbability in the happening of both these events (if separately not improbable) than the odds of 3 to 1. It follows, therefore, with the strictest evidence, that this is a false supposition.

Let us next consider what the degree of this *separate improbability* must be.—It appears that at least it must be so great as to be capable of producing an improbability of 49,999 to 1 in the happening of both events. But it is obvious that, after the wager, this is the improbability of *one* of the events, or of drawing number 1500; and by proposition 1st, if it has this improbability *after* the wager, it must have had it *before*. 49,999 to 1, therefore, was the *separate* improbability of this event; that is, it is the improbability of it when reported by itself, and independently of its having been before-hand named. And there being no reason to think that the improbability in the *other* event, or in laying a wager about this particular number, is not at least equal, the resulting improbability that *both* should happen, must, according to the laws of chance, be 2599'.999,999 to 1.

Further. This point may be otherwise proved thus. The same event cannot be both improbable and not improbable at the same time. Different persons in judging of the same event will form the same judgment, as far as they judge rightly. Suppose then that

two

if it be possible, that there is no sufficient reason to believe this. Let them shew, that

two different persons are told such a common fact as that number 1500 was first drawn in a lottery, one of whom knows that a wager had been laid about it, or that it had been before-hand named, and the other knows nothing of any circumstance of this kind. The former would judge the event improbable, and the latter would be sensible of no improbability in it. Which of these persons judges rightly? the former, without doubt. There was indeed an improbability that this number should be drawn: and it makes no difference, that one man happens to be in circumstances that force him to perceive it, and another not. That this number happened to be named before-hand, no more affects the improbability of drawing it, than that I yesterday writ a letter or took a walk; and the improbability of drawing it after being so named, is no more than the improbability of drawing any other *particular* number. So true is this, that were two witnesses, apparently of equal credit, to report, one that this number had been drawn, and the other that another had been drawn, there would not arise the least reason, merely from the improbability that the number should be drawn which had been named, for any preference of one report to the other. Suppose a trial at law about the number first drawn, and one witness to depose that number 1500 had been first drawn, and another, number 1600, how ridiculous

that Christ and his Apostles were either *enthusiasts* or *impostors*, and account for their

culous would it be to alledge as a circumstance rendering one of the depositions less likely to be true than the other, that some time ago, and unknown to the witnesses, there had been a wager laid about drawing the former number?

In the latter end of the preceding section I have assigned the reason of the greater reluctance with which, after being previously named, we should believe that number 1500 had been drawn than any other. It is only when the reporter is known to be acquainted with this circumstance, that there would be any reason for such reluctance.—In cases where there appears any striking co-incidence, we are led to entertain a distrust of testimony, or to apprehend that it wants the probability it would otherwise have, on account of the temptation which there is in such cases to deceive. Where we see nothing of this kind, we at once receive its reports without regarding improbabilities. On the contrary; where any circumstance appears which may be the foundation of a design to deceive, we receive its reports with almost equal diffidence, whether the improbabilities are little or great: And it is on this account that, in many cases, we are much affected with particular improbabilities, though in others we are not at all sensible of equal or greater improbabilities.—I do not know
how

their conduct and writings on one of those suppositions, taking along with them the

how better to illustrate this than in the following manner.

Suppose a heap of 1000 bits of *white* paper, marked with the numbers 1, 2, 3, &c. up to 1000, with one *black* paper among them. Were it reported that out of such a heap a person had drawn the first trial the *white* paper marked 512, we should easily assent without *minding*, or even *seeing* any improbability. But were it reported, in the same manner, that the *black* paper had been drawn, we should hesitate, and think what we heard improbable. Now, the improbability in both cases is the same; and, there being no more danger of a deception of *sense* in one case than in the other, the true reason of the difference must be, agreeably to what I have observed, that in the former case, we see nothing that can be a foundation for a design to deceive, number 512 having nothing in it to recommend it to a preference; whereas in the latter case we see the contrary. For this reason we should, in like manner, give a readier assent to a report that number 512 had been drawn than number 1, or any other number which seemed to have any thing distinguishing in it that could tend to prejudice the mind in its favour. And for this reason also, we should believe an account that this number had been drawn out of such a heap, more readily than that a

the consideration, how *wild* and *frantic*
they must have been if the former, and
how

black paper had been drawn out of a heap of only *ten*
white and one black, tho' the improbability in the
one case is a hundred times greater than in the other.

—It is thus chiefly, in my opinion, we are to ac-
count for the difference in our regard to the reports of
testimony, and for our being determined in such cases,
much more by some particular circumstances *in facts*
than by any intrinsic improbabilities which they have.

—Were a person to tell us that in throwing *six*
common dies together, he had thrown the *six* numbers
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, our assent would be gained with some
difficulty, though the improbability of doing this is
only 64 to 1. But were the same person to tell us
any story of a common and uninteresting nature, we
should receive it without scruple, though perhaps,
on account of the variety of particular circumstances
in it, previously improbable in a higher degree than
can well be computed.—As *sense*, wherever it is
equally free from the danger of deception, convinces
equally of an event, whatever its improbabilities are:
As, for instance, it convinces equally that a black
paper has been drawn out of a heap of white papers,
whether the chance against it was a hundred, a thou-
sand, or a million to one; so likewise does *testimony*
unless there appears something that may be likely
to give occasion to deceit.

In

how *profane* and *abandoned* if the latter.
But let them not pretend that they are able
to

In what I have said, I have all along kept to the proper sense of the word *improbable*, as it has been defined at the beginning of this note. But it is generally used with such laxness and ambiguity, as cannot but mislead us, if we are not attentive.—Were we to be told that there was a storm of thunder and lightning at such a place in the month of July, we should say that it was not *improbable*. And we should say the same, were we to hear that it happened on such a day, at such an hour, and that such and such persons were killed: In both cases meaning only in general, that events of this kind frequently happened, and that there was no reason to consider them as *incredible*. But if we aimed at speaking with strict propriety, we should use different language; for, if a storm of thunder in July is only not improbable, that is, an event not more unlikely to happen than not; a storm on such a day, and at such an hour, doing such and such particular damages, is an event of which the contrary must be true.—In like manner; should we be told that such a person had got the 10,000l. prize in the lottery, it might be said that it was not *improbable*, meaning that as some person must have it, we can easily believe that this person has had it: not that there were no odds against his having it; for all know that there must have been very great odds against his having it, though a

to prove *a priori*, that no accounts of miracles *can* be true; or satisfy themselves with saying

report which comes through a hundred hands, and for the truth of which perhaps the odds are very inconsiderable, would convince us that he really has had it. Should it be added, that he had but one ticket, we should receive the report as readily as if we knew he had 20, though this makes a great difference in the improbability of the event.

These observations, I hope, may be of use to explain and confirm those which have been made before on the nature of *Historical Evidence*. It seems to follow from them undeniably, that the previous improbabilities of events do by no means affect the credit of testimony in the manner implied in Mr. *Hume's* argument. The position, therefore, on which this argument is founded, cannot be maintained. In order to gain assent to a report, it is not necessary that there should be greater probability or odds *for* its truth, than *against* the happening of the event.

There is a very strong presumption against the simplest common story before any evidence for it. On the contrary; against miracles *in general* there is no presumption at all; for it has been proved that we have no reason for thinking that the course of nature will continue always the same. Miracles, therefore, *in general*, are in the strictest sense, *not improbable*. That is; it is as likely as not, that some time or other, during the continuance of a world, the usual operations

saying lazily, that deceit and falsehood are very *common*, and miracles very *extraordinary*; and that, therefore, the whole question is decided, and there can be no occasion for any further examination. A person who should reason in this manner, in other instances, would be quite ridiculous. Testimony is an evidence which admits of an infinite variety of degrees, and which, sometimes, is scarcely short of demonstration. Tho' it often deceives, yet there are some kinds of it that have never deceived, and that cannot deceive. It is one of the principal sources of all our

G g 3 information

rations of physical causes should, in some instances, fail, and supernatural power interpose. And with respect to *particular* miracles, or miracles said to have been wrought at *such* a time, and attended with such and such particular circumstances, they are capable of being proved by testimony in the same manner with any other *particular* facts. And if it is any proof of the contrary, that they are more improbable and extraordinary than it is that the reports of testimony should be false, there is likewise a proof, that we ought not to believe testimony when it reports numberless facts, which every one in the common course of life is continually ready to believe without difficulty on its credit.

information and knowledge. To argue, therefore, against christianity from the general topic of the commonness of false testimony, is trifling and unjust, unless it can be shewn, that it has been common for *such* testimony as that of the *apostles* to be false *. Historical evidence being of all

* It has appeared in this Dissertation, that the objection, which is the main subject of it, is applicable to facts for which we have the evidence of *sense*, as well as those which depend on the evidence of *testimony*. Were we to be eye-witnesses to any thing quite new to us, and out of the usual course of nature, it might be said, that what we perceive being contradictory to uniform experience, but deceptions of our senses common; therefore, it must be wrong to believe the reality of it; because, this would be trusting a feebler experience in opposition to a stronger, or, receiving a fact upon an evidence, the falsehood of which would be less uncommon than the fact itself. He, therefore, that will guide himself by the principles which are the foundation of this objection, and balance opposite experiences in the manner it requires, must have been an unbeliever, though he had *seen* the miracles related in the New Testament. — Though our senses have often deceived us, we cannot help relying, in general, without diffidence on their information. There are innumerable circumstances

all degrees, what is true of *other* historical evidence is nothing to *this*. If the facts are extraordinary, there may be peculiar circumstances attending them taking off all improbability from them on this account; and it may be even less wonderful that they should be true, than that the testimony reporting them should be false. It has been shewn indeed, that, in order to our reception of the christian miracles, it is by no means necessary to prove this. A great deal, however, has been said to prove it with much strength of reason, by

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the

circumstances and instances in which they have never deceived us: And, therefore, when in any particular instance they convey to us any information, it is trifling to object, that they have informed us wrong in some *other* instances, except those other instances were of a similar nature. And even supposing the similarity, the objection will be of little weight, unless the number of such instances in which they have deceived us, is nearly equal to or greater than those in which they have not deceived us.—It has been shewn that these observations are applicable, with like propriety and force, to the information we receive from testimony,

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the defenders of Christianity*. Why
should not some notice be taken of the
argu-

* See Dr. Adams's Essay on Miracles.—When Mr. *Hume*, in a passage before quoted, p. 387, lays it down as a *maxim*, “That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the falsehood of it is more miraculous than the fact it endeavours to establish;” his meaning, I should think, must be, that as, according to him, no testimony is sufficient to prove an *ordinary* fact, unless its falsehood is *improbable* in a higher degree than the fact is improbable, in the case of a *miraculous* fact the falsehood of the testimony must be *miraculous* in a higher degree than the fact is *miraculous*: that is, it must be *certain*, that there is no other account to be given of the falsehood of the testimony, besides a miraculous deception of the senses and subversion of the faculties of the persons who give it. We should not, therefore, be able to convince Mr. *Hume* of the truth of christianity, though we could prove to a *demonstration*, that the apostles did not intend to deceive, and were not themselves deceived except miracles were employed to deceive them. It must be further proved to him, that a miraculous deception of their senses and subversion of their faculties would be *greater* miracles than the facts they attest. At this rate, agreeably to what was observed in the last note, it is plain, that had we ourselves *seen* the miracles of Christ and his apostles, we must have been entirely doubtful about
about

arguments they offer? Why should not those who reject christianity tell us, in particu-

about them, unless we were persuaded that a deception of our senses required a greater exertion of supernatural power, than the reality of what we saw.— Surely, an argument that proves so much cannot have any real weight. If just, we are under a necessity of concluding, that there is no reason to believe the reality of any thing we hear, see or feel in any other sense, than as an *idea* or *mode of perception* in our minds. This, however, cannot startle Mr. Hume; for it is the very conclusion to which his philosophy carries us, and which, in his *Treatise on Human Nature* and *Philosophical Essays*, he has, with an ingenuity that distinguishes all his writings, taught us to draw.

I hope I shall be excused if I give room here to an observation which is a little foreign to the present purpose.—It has been objected, that supposing the reality of the miraculous facts of christianity, there is no connexion between them and the truth of its doctrines. This, in my opinion, is to trifle inexcusably; nor can it be worth any christian's while to say a word in answer to it, till *one* person is found who can honestly declare, that he believes the miracles of Christ, but denies his divine mission; that, in particular, he is convinced that he raised several persons from the dead, and at last rose himself from the dead and ascended to heaven, and afterwards poured forth

particular, how they account for the rapid progress it made in the world; for the manner in which St. Paul mentions the miraculous gifts in his epistles; and for the fortitude with which the apostles, in giving their testimony, sacrificed every worldly interest, and at last laid down their lives? Why, instead of making any attempts of this kind, do they, in general, insist on topicks which affect not the *direct* evidence, or found their objections on the adulterations of christianity by human inventions and civil establishments, without taking pains to discover what it is as it lies in the New Testament?

If the christian religion is true, we have clear information on points the most interesting.

on the apostles and first christians those gifts of the spirit mentioned in the New Testament; but, at the same time, doubts whether he said true when he declared, that he was the *resurrection and the life*; that all power was given him in heaven and earth; and that the hour would come, when all that are in their graves should hear his voice and come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation. John xi. 25.—Ver. 28, 29.

resting. A vicious man has *every thing* to fear, and a virtuous man *every thing* to hope. The question, therefore, whether it is of divine original, is, as I observed at the beginning of this dissertation, of unspeakable importance. It is inexcusable to treat it with indifference; or, with conceited half-thinkers, to suffer ourselves to be led into infidelity by a few specious difficulties, without critically examining the original code itself, and considering carefully the joint force of all the evidences *internal, external* and *presumptive* taken together. If, after such an examination, any person should judge, that the whole amount of the evidence is inadequate to the proof of the facts on which christianity is founded, he ought next to consider how far it goes towards proving them. That it goes some way towards this is absolutely certain. The furthest that any enquirer can go in his rejection of christianity is, to think that the objections outweigh the evidence; but he cannot possibly think that there is *no* evidence. I should

should imagine indeed, that he cannot possibly avoid seeing, that there is very considerable and striking evidence, tho' he may judge it *insufficient*. It is not conceivable, that any one can read the New Testament, and observe with what a force and purity, before unknown, it teaches morality and natural religion; the sublime and singular character it has drawn, without the least appearance of art or effort, in the history it gives of the life, discourses and Miracles of Jesus Christ; and the spirit of piety, goodness, love and heavenly mindedness which breathes thro' all its parts: It is not, I say, conceivable, that any person after such a perusal of the New Testament can be able easily to persuade himself, that the writers of it were such *miracles* of madness or profligacy, as they must have been, if the facts to which they bore testimony were false, and the religion they taught an imposition on mankind.— But not to dwell on this. For the reason which has been assigned it is certain, that no infidels, who are inquisitive and candid,

did, can go beyond a state of doubt. They must acknowledge that, at least, there is evidence enough to give a chance for the truth of christianity, and they ought to consider seriously to what this chance amounts, and what obligations, in respect of practice, their own state of doubt lays them under. Would they do this, they could never make christianity a subject of ridicule or contempt. Though not convinced of its truth, they would live under the apprehension that it may possibly prove true. Those who do not act thus cannot reasonably complain of the threatenings denounced in the scriptures against infidelity. These threatenings certainly should not be applied, nor were they ever intended to be applied to any honest enquirers, be their doubts what they will. Nothing is *fundamental* besides a sincere desire to know and practise truth and right, or an honest and good heart. Speculative errors can be no further *criminal*, than they proceed from *criminal* dispositions, and are made sanc-

tuaries for vice. The unbelief condemned in the *New Testament* is only that which has this source, as our Lord has himself expressly told us. John iii. 18, 19. *He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, the reason of the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one who doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.*—How far these words are applicable to any modern infidels they themselves only are capable of determining. There is a wide difference between the state of things now, and in the times of Christ and his Apostles.—The favourableness of christianity to virtue must indeed be a powerful recommendation of it to good minds; and is almost enough, without the aid of miracles, to prove its heavenly original. For this reason, those who *do the will of God* are
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likely to know of the doctrine whether it be of God*. Nothing is much more incredible than that a religion so calculated to raise our affections above this world, and to lead us to all that is holy and worthy, should be the offspring of such wickedness as that of its first preachers must have been, if they were impostors.—But whatever effect considerations of this kind have upon me, I am far from thinking that it is necessary they should have the same effect upon *others*. The difficulties which all inquisitive and candid christians must themselves feel, may undoubtedly appear to even good minds in so strong a light, as to leave them unsatisfied. It would be much better, if christians, instead of being so free as they often are in ascribing infidelity to the worst motives, would take care that their own faith is the result of honest enquiry, and at the same time study to demonstrate the excellence of their religion by the excellence of their tempers and lives. Would
to

* John vii. 17.

to God, they could be engaged to this. Christianity would then flourish, and the whole world would be soon won to the love and admiration of it.—Those christians who, instead of acting thus, *disgrace* their religion by bitter tempers and evil works, while they pretend zeal for it; and, though they own the authority of Christ, break his laws and cause his name to be blasphemed; such christians have more to answer for than can be imagined. They ought to ascribe to themselves, in a great measure, that infidelity which they are disposed to lament, and which, perhaps, they wish to punish. Their *faith* is a *curse* to them, and their *friendship* an *enmity* to Christ, by which he is injured more inexcusably and dangerously, than by any open and avowed opposition.

T H E E N D.

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